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BATISTA'S BOMBSHELL!

"If I Don't Beat Undertaker, My Title Is Worthless!"

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RICH FREEDA/WWE/COURTESY OF CW NETWORK

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DAVID ROMANOSKY

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As the "Million-Dollar Man," Ted DiBiase laughed all the way to the bank in the late-1980s and early-'90s, but he eventually came to the realization that he was spiritually destitute. He re-committed to his Christian faith in 1992 and has gone on to become a minister and much sought-after speaker. In this 90-minute interview with Editor-in-Chief Harry Burkett, DiBiase talks about all the phases of his storied career, from his early days in the Mid-South and Georgia to his stints in the WWF and WCW

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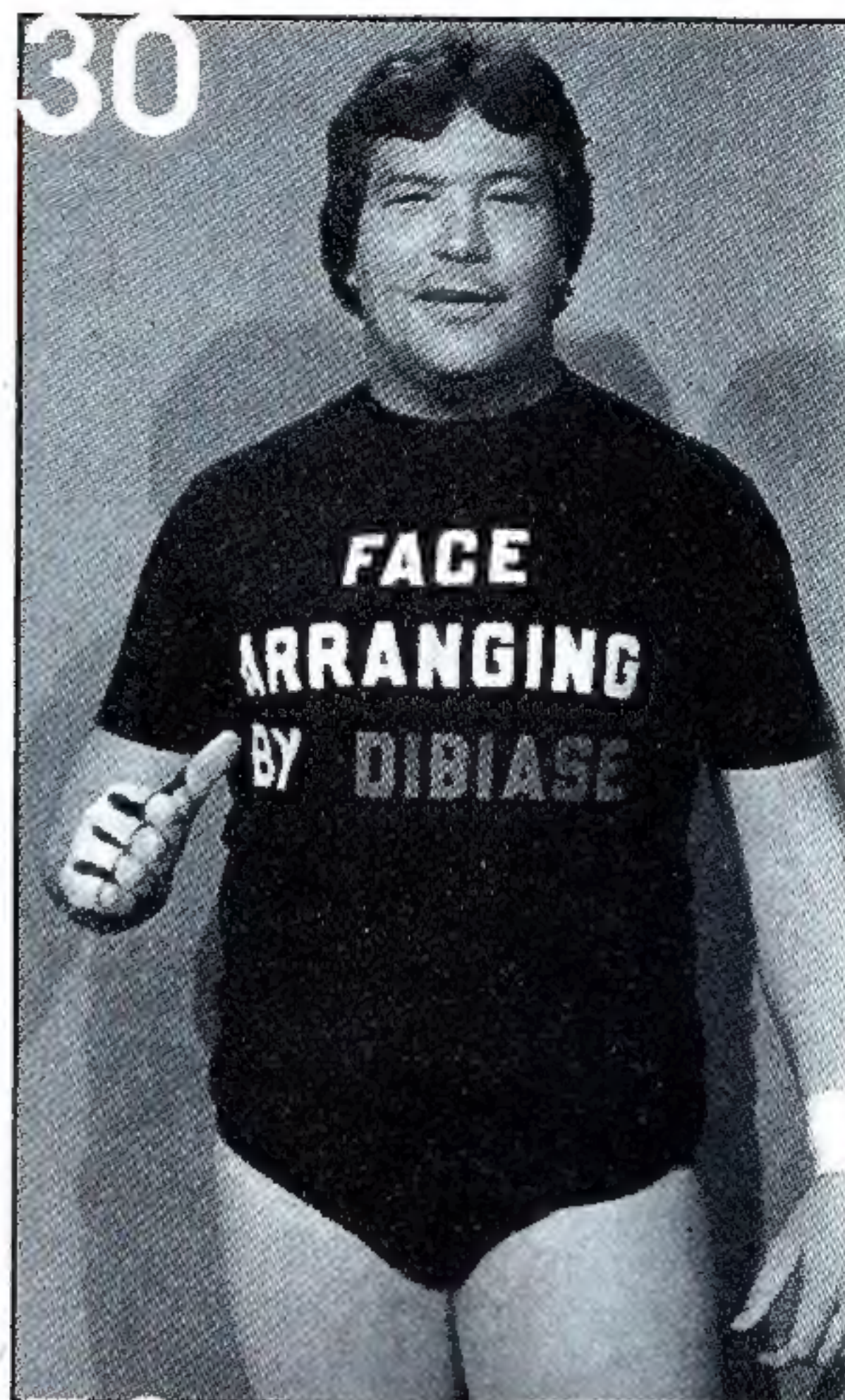
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Look for the Volume 20, 2008, issue of THE WRESTLER/Inside Wrestling on sale January 29, 2008

YOUR LETTERS

RHODES TO GLORY

If your magazine is looking for the next mega-superstar in the industry, then look no further than Cody Rhodes. A second-generation superstar with the looks and the drive to succeed, Cody is by far the most talented wrestler I have seen in quite some time. It doesn't hurt either that this young man has the best trainer in the business, bar none, in his father Dusty.

On a recent episode of Raw, Rhodes defeated the equally tough Daivari with relative ease. Young Cody has a fantastic amateur wrestling background, and I know that this will help him in attaining his goal of becoming the Raw World champion one day. If he continues to work hard and listen to his father, Cody will undoubtedly be one of the greatest wrestlers ever.

FRANCIS ROLLINS
Bozeman, MT

BIG NERVE

Where does Bryan Danielson get off demanding a title shot from Nigel McGuinness? Danielson doesn't deserve a title shot. He has not beat one big singles name since returning from his eye injury. His biggest wins have been over Mike Quackenbush, Chasyn Rance, and Chris Hero. On October 6 in Boston, Danielson had the nerve to get in McGuinness' face and demand a title match. Then Austin Aries got between them and told Danielson and McGuinness that he wants the title.

If anyone deserves an ROH title shot, it's Aries. In October, he defeated Roderick Strong and Bryan Danielson. Now *he's* the kind of guy worthy to challenge the Ring of Honor champion.

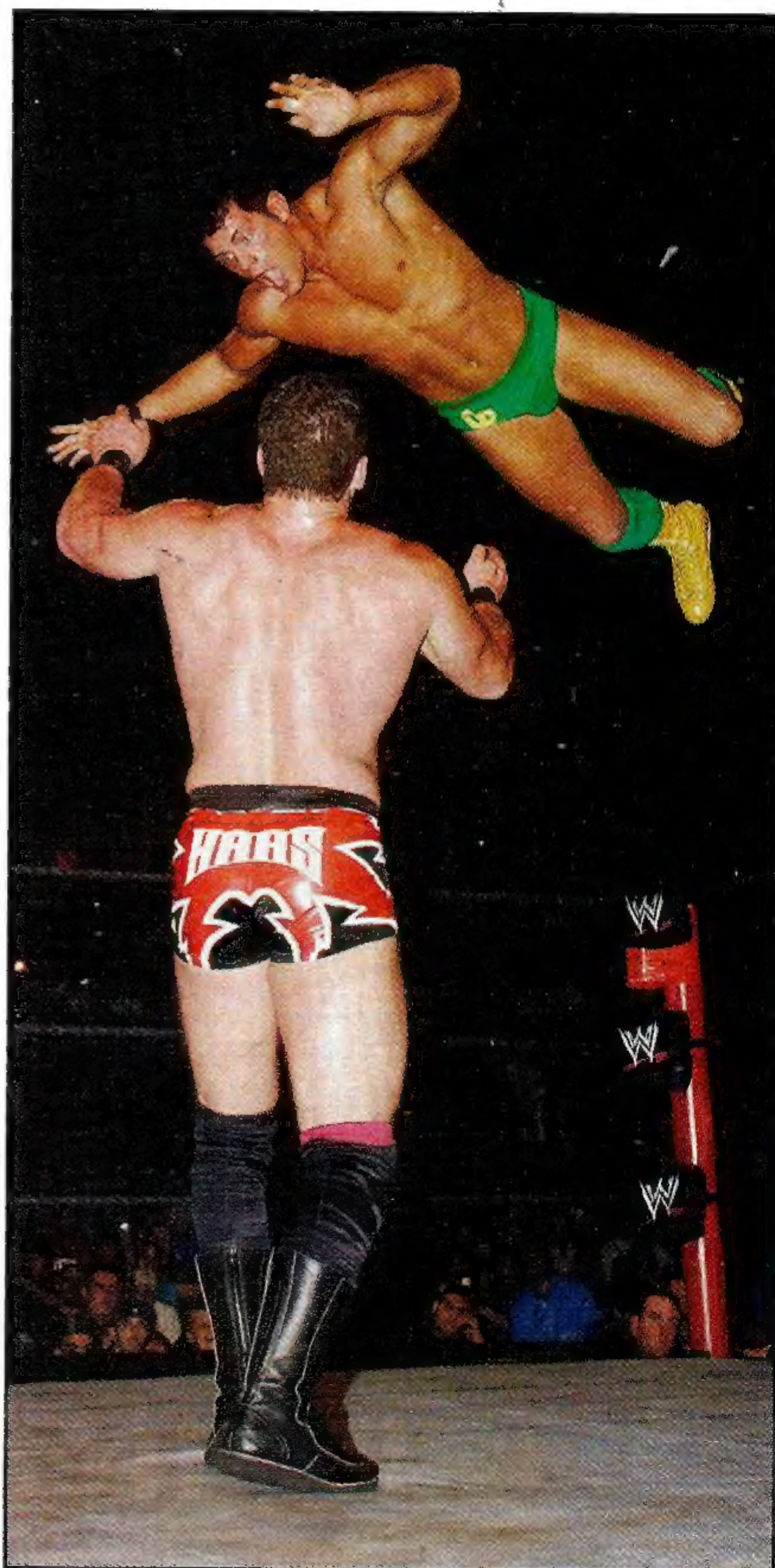
KEVIN HUGHES
Philadelphia, PA

OVERWORKED TALENT

I am an avid reader of your wrestling magazines and your weekly online column ("The Turn," pwi-online.com). I barely have time to watch wrestling anymore, so your column helps me keep up. Lately, I've been really turned off by the whole drug scandal going on. No other sport demands so much of the human body. Not football, basketball, or even boxing. It's no wonder that professional wrestlers have to turn to painkillers and alcohol to alleviate the aches

and stress from being in the ring that much. It's also no wonder that wrestling is plagued by injuries and fatalities.

Wrestling needs to stop promoting house shows and only ask its performers to compete once a week (twice for pay-per-views). In one of *PWI's* past issues, house



Second-generation star Cody Rhodes has already attracted believers in his young career, among them Francis Rollins, who feels Cody is blessed not only with natural talent, but a terrific trainer in Dusty Rhodes himself.

SEND LETTERS TO: **YOUR LETTERS**

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shows were regarded as supplemental income to WWE. So why have them? If these wrestlers only had to work once or twice a week, they would have more time to recuperate and heal, leading to less injuries, and they would have more time to spend in their personal lives. They would have more time to train and prepare for their next match, which could lead to better performances. I am sick of hearing the news about another wrestler dying before his time, usually because of drugs.

RICK JACKSON
th3_gr8t_r1ck@yahoo.com

AT A LOSS FOR FANS

After hearing several rumors concerning the return of Chris Jericho, I know he will make the right decision and come back to WWE. I am not sure that going to TNA will be wise on his part because look what happened to Kurt Angle. I mean, seriously, even a guy like Angle, who is perhaps the most decorated professional wrestler of all-time, couldn't jumpstart that company.

As Jericho's musical career came crashing down, so did his fan base in wrestling. Once Chris realized he was not the musical superstar that he thought, he fully understood where he needed to be and that is in WWE. It was here where Jericho was made into a financial success and international superstar. If Chris does decide to come back to wrestling full-time, I will try my hardest to cheer him and appreciate the wrestling icon that he once was. In order for

that to happen though, "Mr. Y2J" will have to earn back the respect of not only myself, but also millions of wrestling fans around the world.

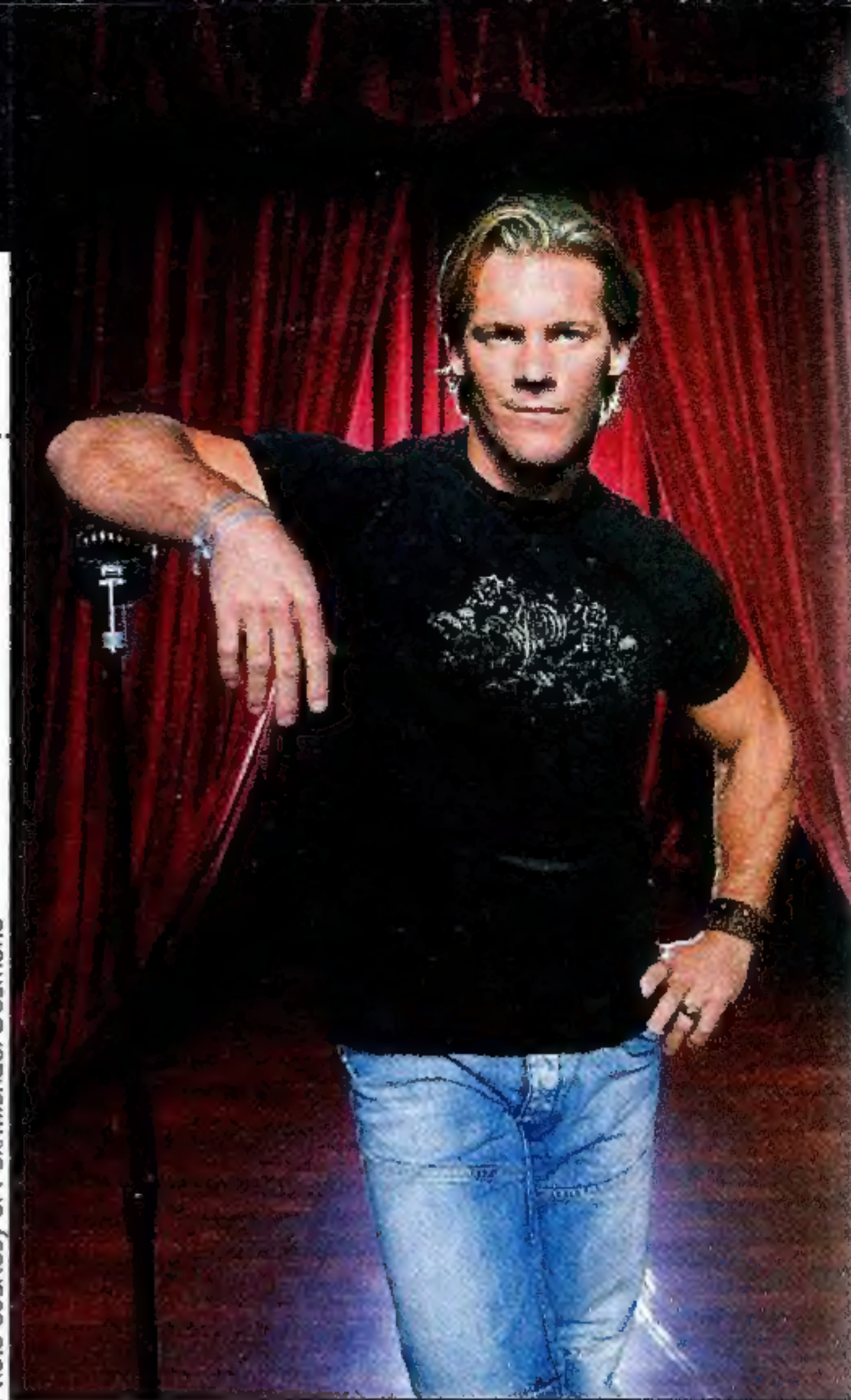
CHRIS THOMPSON
Smith, IA

GET WELL, JOHN CENA

Some people forget that the wrestlers they are booing are real, living, breathing people. John Cena has put up with so much and has proven himself to all of the people who have put him down, and even in his most depressing hour, the fans in the arena still hate him. They hate him so much that they actually cheered when Mr. McMahon announced that Cena was forced to vacate the Raw World title reign due to a torn muscle. That's a serious injury, and all anyone cared about was that they would be able to get a champion they approve of. Well, congratulations, Cena-haters. Now you have Randy Orton to make WWE a living hell.

BRITTANY BLAKE
Rowlett, TX □

Photo courtesy of Fox/Michael Desmond



Where will Chris Jericho go? Wrestling seems to be in Chris' future, and reader Chris Thompson hopes he makes the proper decision and will return to WWE.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING

IN RECENT WEEKS, Raw has undergone a major facelift, due to a devastating injury to **John Cena** and the release of **Booker T**. Fortunately, **Randy Orton** and a returning **Shawn Michaels** have helped fill the massive void.

Cena tore his pectoral muscle while performing a hiptoss on **Ken Kennedy** during a Raw match in October. Cena was then forced to wrestle the rest of his main-event match—and resist a post-match attack by Orton—with the use of only one arm.

This was no doubt a disappointing development for a champion who was in the midst of the longest title reign since **Hulk Hogan** was in his prime. The excitement generated from the news of Orton becoming the new champion at No Mercy prompted announcer **Jim Ross**

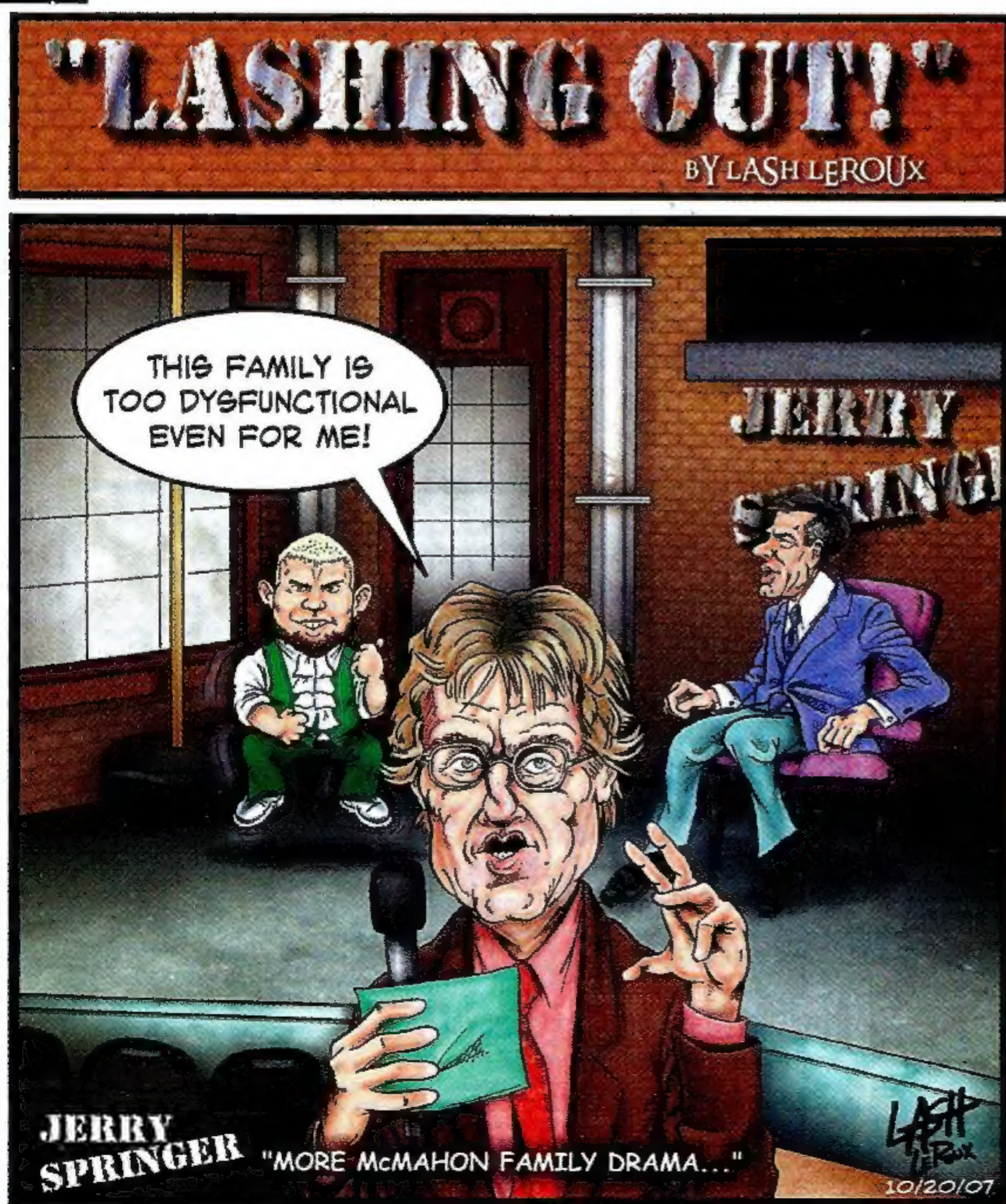
to comment on his weekly blog, "The Cena-haters and the anti-Cena proponents, I assume, are happy that Cena is off their TV sets for now, but most will retort with the same old, worn-out response of 'I just wanted someone else to be champion.' Oh, well, to each his own, I suppose."

While the injury was an untimely one for Cena, the loss of the longtime champion on Raw could offer the opportunity for any number of wrestlers to step up and become main-event performers. Men such as Orton, Kennedy, and **Jeff Hardy** now have the chance to vie for a basically wide-open main-event slot for the next few months. At the very least, Cena's injury paved the way for the return of Michaels to Raw. Many people believe HBK will be looking for revenge against Orton for putting him out of action for several months.

In other news, fans were disappointed to hear WWE's announcement that it had released former WCW and Smackdown World champion **Booker T** and his wife/valet, **Sharmell** on wwe.com on October 16. It was widely reported that Booker was serving a 60-day suspension for a violation of WWE's Wellness Program. Since his departure, Booker has dedicated a lot of time to promoting his Pro Wrestling Alliance promotion in his native Houston.

Amid rampant hopes of Internet pundits that Booker will head for Orlando, TNA signed a number of familiar names to fight for the newly created women's title at Bound for Glory. In the end, former WWE women's champion **Gail Kim** took the honors after last eliminating **Roxxi Laveaux** in a 10-woman gauntlet match. Other women that competed for the title included **Christy Hemme**, **Traci Brooks**, **Jackie Moore**, **Shelly Martinez** (better known as ECW's Ariel), former WWE developmental talents **ODB** and **Angel Williams**, independent star **Talia Madison**, and NWA women's champion **Awesome Kong**. No doubt, the creation of a TNA women's title is great news for independent female wrestlers looking for an opportunity to make it big.

In other news, the wrestling world is again mourning the loss of several wrestlers. **Frank Butcher**, a well-known Mexican wrestler who is best known for his time spent competing in **Johnny Rougeau's** Montreal-based promotion

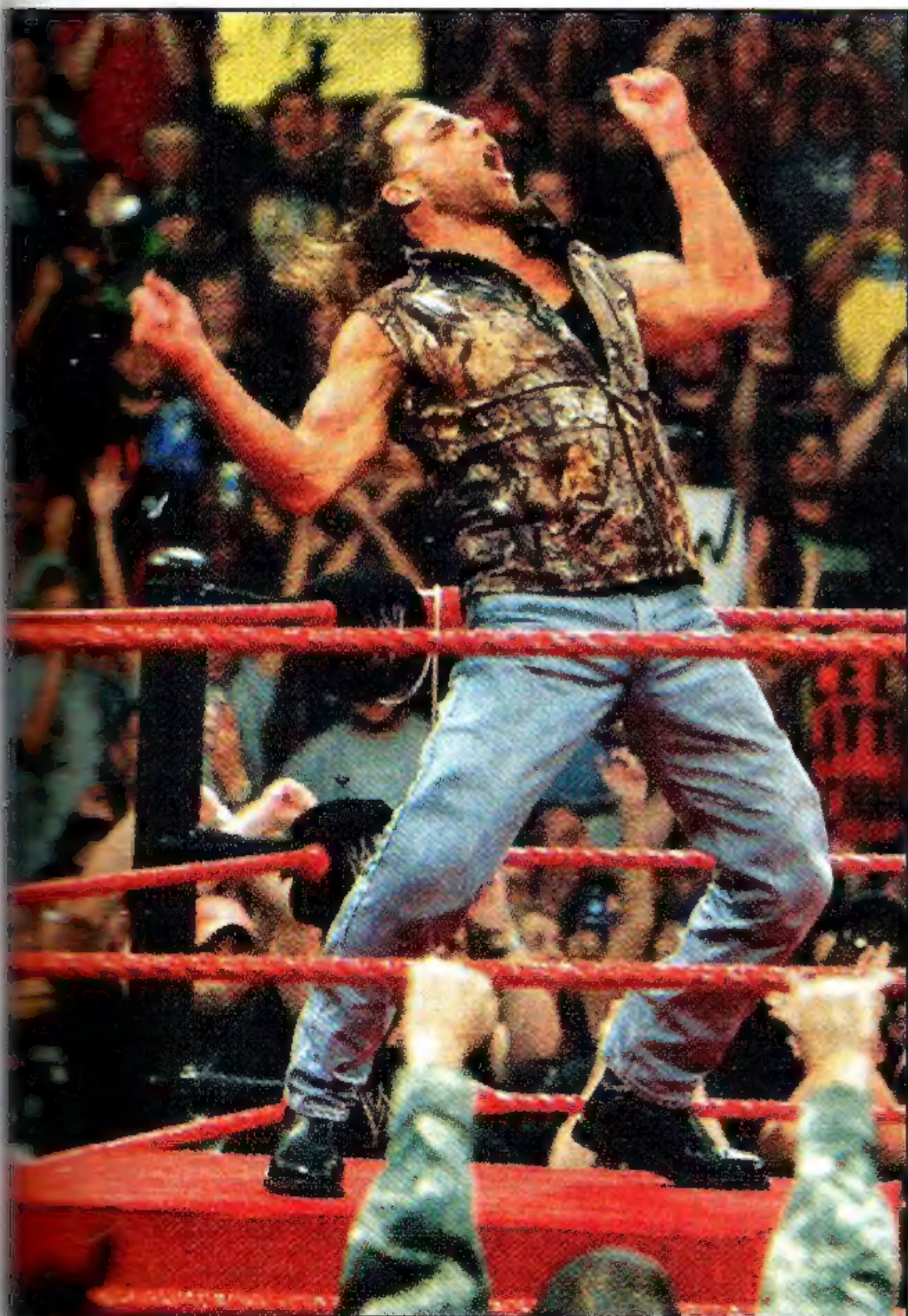


BY BRADY HICKS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

and **Stu Hart**'s Calgary-based Stampede Wrestling, was 84.

The staff here at THE WRESTLER is also saddened to hear news of the deaths of several others involved with the sport, including **Billy Darnell** (Billy Rogers), Canadians **Ivan Radocaj** and **Monty Black**, lucha libre star **Carlos de Lucio Lagarde**, Malenko family friend **John Meek** (also known as "**Iron**" **Mike Steele**), the original "**Great Malenko**" **Frank Fozo**, and former Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling referee **Zack Murray**. We send our saddest condolences to the family and friends of each of these men.

Nick Hogan, the son of Hulk Hogan, faces a lot of questions after news that his car wreck from a few months back will leave his good friend, **John Graziano**,



The silver lining in John Cena's injury was the faster-than-expected return of fan favorite Shawn Michaels. HBK will surely whet the appetites of squealing Cena fans until "The Champ" can return.



After weeks of speculation, WWE has officially announced the release of Booker T and Sharmell via wwe.com. But fear not, the two have kept busy promoting Booker's PWA promotion in Houston, Texas.

with potentially permanent brain damage. In fact, recent reports indicate that the former U.S. Marine will be forced to spend the rest of his life in a nursing home. Graziano was not wearing his seat belt. Our thoughts are also with the Graziano family at this difficult time.

Over in Ring of Honor, former Pure champion **Nigel McGuinness** finally unseated **Takeshi Morishima** for the ROH title at the company's Undeniable pay-per-view out of Edison, New Jersey. Unfortunately for McGuinness, who had been chasing the champion for the past eight months, there will be no time to rest as he has already signed to defend the title as part of a West Coast tour in cities such as Las Vegas and San Francisco. We're looking forward to some classics with former champion **Bryan Danielson**.



A 10-woman gauntlet match for the new TNA women's title ended with Roxxi Laveaux being eliminated by Gail Kim. Roxxi is new to TNA, but her in-ring experience in SHIMMER, World Women's Wrestling, and New England Championship Wrestling makes her a viable competitor to Gail's newly acquired belt.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Meanwhile, over in TNA, it has been reported that company Talent Relations Director **Terry Taylor** has offered a release to any wrestler that may be unhappy with his or her current standing in the company. While the content of this open letter—and its intended recipients—is still unknown, it fuels a lot of speculation that there may be one or more wrestlers backstage who would like to make a jump to Raw, Smackdown, or ECW in the future. Could there be another massive talent shift such as when **The Radicals** jumped from WCW over to the WWF in 2000? Only time will tell.

Finally, with all of the deaths, injuries, firings, and drug headlines that have recently dominated the wrestling landscape, fans were recently entertained (in a way) by some different news at the expense of former TNA and *Survivor* reality TV star **Jonny Fairplay**. While delivering a routine during Fox's *Reality Really Awards*, the former wrestler—who had leapt into former *Partridge Family* child star **Danny Bonaduce's** arms and performed a lewd act—was tossed head-first to the stage floor. He landed face-first on the stage and knocked out one of his teeth, also shifting three more teeth, damaging the supporting bone, and breaking one of his toes.

These are some of the top headlines in the wrestling world today. As always, stay tuned for further developments. □

British phenom Nigel McGuinness' win over Takeshi Morishima on October 6 enabled McGuinness to leave the pay-per-view with the Ring of Honor title in hand. Now the Brit is set to defend it against former ROH champ Bryan Danielson.

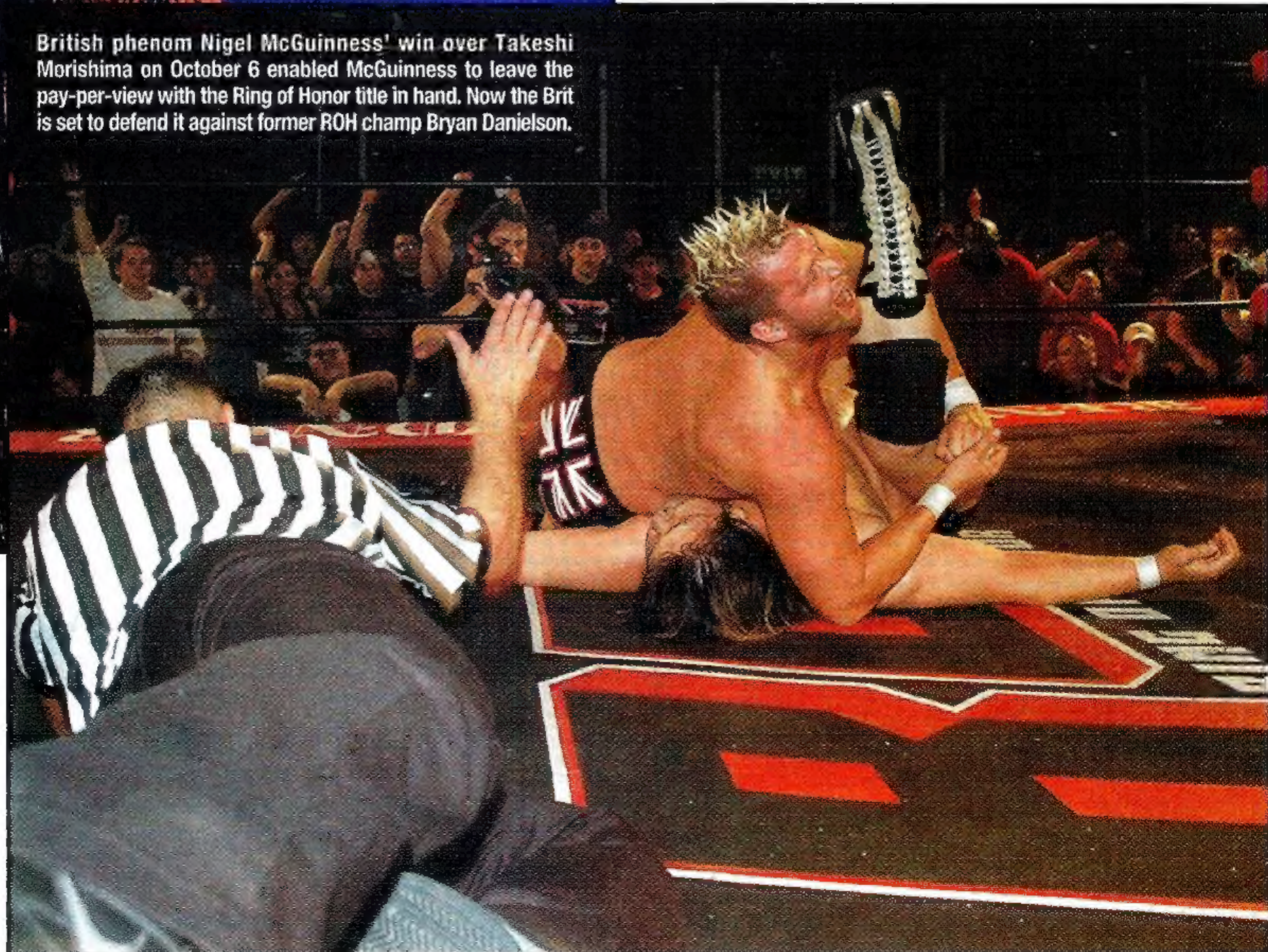


Photo by Joe Zanolle

[K R E W - C U T S]

BY FRANK KREWDA

The Benoit saga. Opinions about Chris Benoit are like birthdays and mothers these days ... everybody has one. However, I've chosen to keep mine to myself. Why? Because I have no opinion of Benoit and the events that unfolded in June.

That's not to say I don't feel poorly for the victims or the surviving members of Benoit's family. The fact is I refuse to speculate on what drove Benoit to commit

such heinous acts. I can't and won't presume to understand the mindset of a homicidal, suicidal maniac, just as I wouldn't presume to understand the mindset of a pedophile, drug addict, or terrorist. And I can only wish some members of the media and experts of wrestling culture would've shown similar restraint when feeling the urge to wax judgmental and conclusive.

Steroids! The wrestling lifestyle! Professional pressure! Personal grief! Recreational drugs! Brain damage! Pundit after pundit pointed to these factors as the cause or causes of the tragedy. But the only person who knows why Chris Benoit did what he did is Chris Benoit, and he ain't talking. Besides, lots of wrestlers face similar pressures, day in and day out. The last time I checked, they weren't accused of snuffing out their families.

It may be human nature to seek answers when bad things occur, but answers are rarely simple in complex matters, and spreading hearsay is irresponsible. We simply don't know what caused Benoit to murder his wife, child, and himself. There's plenty of conjecture, but no facts. And that's why I won't issue any heavy-handed statements.

Friends, fans and co-workers are grappling with the question, "How could Chris have done this?" Yet I think the answer is rather obvious. There were two Chris Benois. The undersized, un-charismatic workhorse who willed a world title around his waist existed, but so did the ultra-violent monster who wiped out his family.

This might be difficult for friends, family, and fans to swallow, and I don't mean to be insensitive, but I'm inclined to believe that killers carry around a little something extra inside of them that allows them to cross the line and commit atrocities under the right (or wrong) circumstances. I'm not saying Benoit was a natural born killer. I'm saying it's possible he was. How else can anyone explain the canard of good people doing bad things?

I also feel people may get closer to a satisfactory answer by resisting the tendency to let their image of Chris Benoit the wrestler cloud their image of Chris Benoit the person, and vice-versa. The hard-working, dedicated performer—whose very name was synonymous with integrity—apparently lacked it in his private life. Should levelheaded adults really be shocked by this inconsistency? I'm not.

Even my colleagues at this magazine were



The truth is more interesting than fiction when it comes to The Iron Sheik. In a series of interviews on YouTube, an apparently drunken Sheik sounds off about his marital and financial woes.

forced to think long and hard about how they should treat Benoit going forward: Should he be remembered as a hero or a villain? I've always felt he should be remembered as both, because he was both.

Just as Pete Rose set the MLB base hit record and bet on baseball, Chris Benoit wowed us in the ring and disgusted us outside of it. His professional accomplishments shouldn't be ignored or minimized, but neither should the terrible things he did to Nancy and Daniel.

Peace in the Middle East ... On balance, I never found The Iron Sheik's interviews and promos especially compelling. Of course, his occasional reference to "Gene" Mean Okerlund and his fractured English provided a few yuks, but I wouldn't say Sheik had the same cache as Ric Flair or Roddy Piper on the mike.

Ironically, though, the former WWF champ's recent interviews are the toast of YouTube. The next time you find yourself with a free hour on your hands, go to the site and input Iron Sheik in the search field.

There's no shortage of clips featuring Sheik, apparently in various states of intoxication, railing against The Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, The Rock, Brian Blair, Nikolai Volkoff, and others. Our favorite Iranian's ranting is captivating in that car crash kind of way.

Yet they're also kind of sad. In one clip, Sheik explains how his former wife bilked him out of \$17-million and admits that he can't read or write English. When you consider the recent reports of his erratic behavior, you may even feel a few pangs of guilt for gawking at what seems to be a broken, bitter, disoriented man.

Be advised that the videos are vulgar and racially insensitive at times, but still more interesting than the mush he used to mumble during his in-ring career.

Heading in opposite directions ... What happens to former superstars once their in-ring careers are over? Guess it depends on what their priorities are.

Lex Luger and David Heath (Gangrel) are heading in opposite directions these days. Luger is looking to shed the nefarious trappings of the wrestling lifestyle after finding religion while incarcerated in Florida. The prison chaplain reportedly helped Lex see the error of his ways and committed himself to tending to Lex's spiritual needs. Luger currently lives in a



David Heath (Gangrel) has yet to see the same light of redemption as Lex Luger. Gangrel's newest venture is in the pornography industry as a director, which is sure to delight the demonic forces.

room of the pastor's apartment while he tries to find a new path in life. Luger's transformation was chronicled in a recent issue of *Christian Living Today*. It would be very easy to paint Lex as just one more phony who claims to have found God after hitting rock bottom. But, considering how many of his former co-workers have died in the past decade, it's almost inspiring to see him wise up. I wish him the best of luck.

Meanwhile, former WWE star Gangrel is seeking salvation through more carnal means. He recently signed a 12-movie directing deal with the New Porn Order production company. Gangrel's debut film, *Miami Rump Shakerz 2*, is scheduled for release in November. In addition to directing movies, Gangrel will make public appearances for the New Porn Order. In some ways, I wish Gangrel nothing but success as well. □

ON ASSIGNMENT

THAT BLOODCURDLING SCREAM I heard through one of the many open windows of my Upper East Side apartment in New York City on the unseasonably warm evening of October 9 couldn't have been coming from the mouth of one Vincent Kennedy McMahon, could it?

For those of you non-New Yorkers out there, I should tell you that any time there's no traffic (which is to say never), you can travel by car from my apartment to WWE headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut, in what seems like only a matter of minutes.

Still ... *nah*, couldn't have been. Vince's voice isn't that loud. But I imagine there was some screaming being done in Stamford on the day news broke that Raw had scored its lowest rating in a decade, a paltry 2.8. This news came, of course, just a week after we all found out that

John Cena had torn a pectoral muscle and would be out for six to 12 months.

Ouches all around WWE.

Randy Orton as the new Raw World champ wasn't a good quick fix. But what were the other options? Triple-H. Chris Jericho. Triple-H. Shawn Michaels. Triple-H. Triple-H, anyone?

I'm here to tell you WWE should have been ready for this and that it should have been more ready for Edge's injury on the Smackdown side just a few months earlier. And The Undertaker's injury just before that. And Bobby Lashley's injury. And ... you get the idea.

You see, when they're all healthy, WWE has a fantastic array of main-event talent on the Raw and Smackdown rosters. But it ought to have more.

So why doesn't it? I blame a lot of it on a six-letter word that sports fans either really love or really hate.

Parity.

Parity in the National Football League or Major League Baseball means there are a lot of pretty good to very good teams playing but very few truly elite ones. Virtually anybody has a legitimate shot of beating anyone else on a given night, and a large number of teams remain in post-season contention deep into each season. That means the fans of those teams stay interested deep into the season, which means the teams and leagues end up making more money from those fans.

If you like seeing a lot of good teams but not many great ones, you're a fan of parity. If not, then you're not. It has its good and bad points.

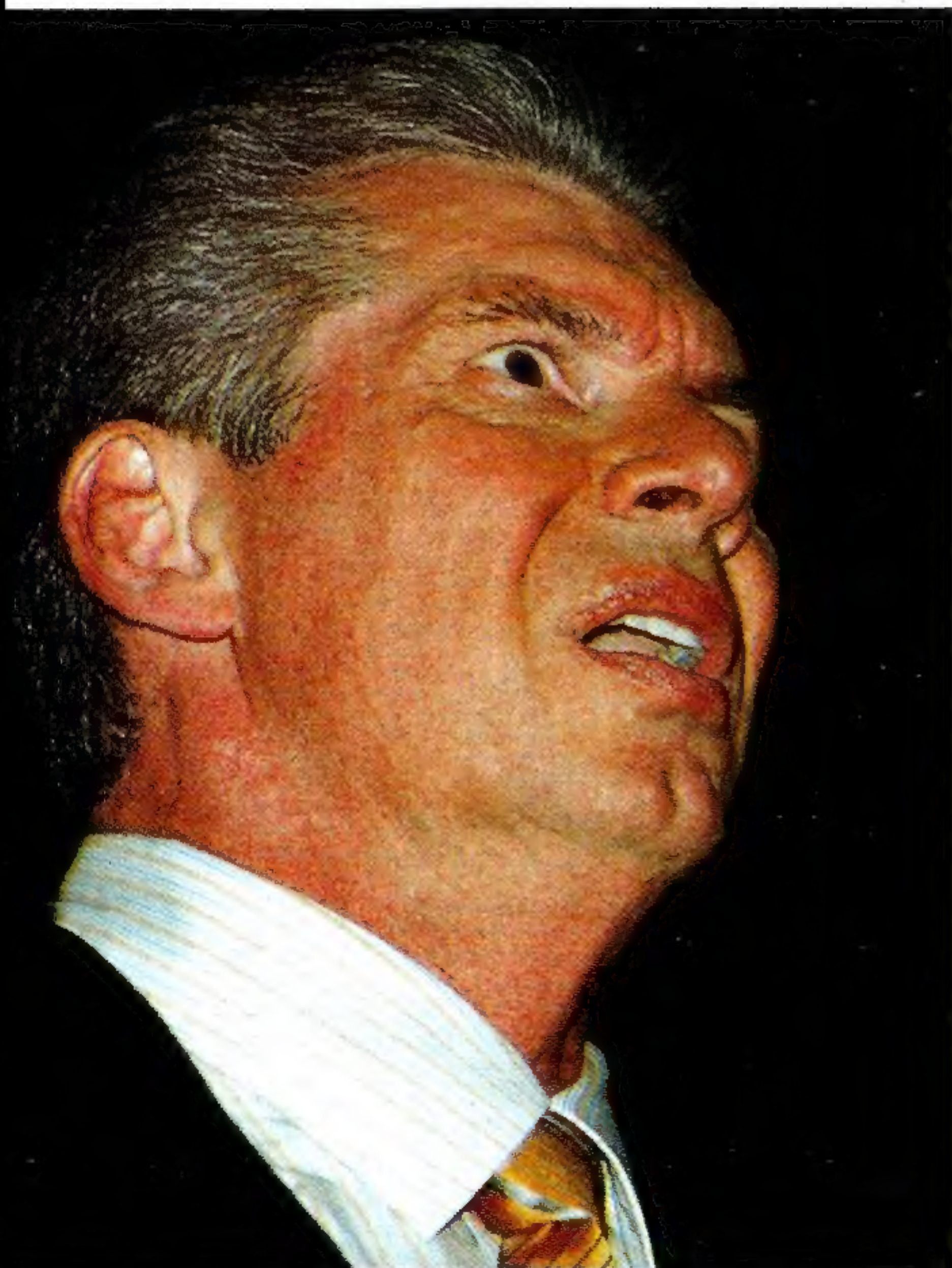
By the way, you can thank my new friend Amanda for that little "real sports" lesson. The more time I spend with her, the more I learn. But after Amanda taught me this lesson recently, I realized that parity applies to WWE as well.

It has its good and bad points as well.

Parity in the mid-card ranks has made for a few wonderful and somewhat overlooked feuds of late. Two in particular have stood out to me.

On the Raw side, I've seen Jeff Hardy vs. Mr. Kennedy live several times already. Always a terrific match, always very competitive, always tough to pick a winner. Same applies on Smackdown when I watch Matt Hardy vs. MVP. I'd probably give the edge to the Hardy Boy in each feud, but it's real close in both feuds. Even feuds are better for us, the fans, in the short term, but they can be very damaging in the long run, especially in desperate times such as these.

The more even the feud is, the harder it is for either of the participants to stand out and then move up. You keep



Imagine the reaction of Vince McMahon after reading the Nielsen rating results for the October 8 edition of Raw. A 2.8 is a number WWE hasn't seen for its flagship program since December 2002. The blame could fall on John Cena's injury, but it might be the result of a roster with few standout stars.

BY LIZ HUNTER ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

having even feuds in the mid-card and you get branded a mid-carder pretty quick. Jeff Hardy doesn't seem primed for a run at (or with) the Raw World title. Same goes for Matt Hardy and MVP in regard to the Smackdown World gold. You'll find a lot of people who believe Kennedy could carry the 15 pounds of gold on Monday nights, but given the number of key losses he's suffered lately, it's hard to believe that this is in anyone's short-term plans.

When the red-hot Edge had to give up the Smackdown World title due to injury this summer, I rooted for Matt Hardy to be the last man standing in the subsequent battle royal. I didn't expect it to happen, as it made no logical sense given how he was being booked at the time, but I rooted nonetheless. I'd have gladly settled for MVP. We got The Great Khali instead, followed by Batista regaining the gold, only to see The Undertaker waiting in the shadows.

We've seen Undertaker on top, we've seen way too much of Batista holding gold or contending for it of late, and the woefully unskilled Khali is a safe choice because of his size and look.

As we all sat around debating what should be done with the Raw championship in the wake of Cena's injury, I wanted to see Jeff Hardy emerge from No Mercy—somehow some way—with the gold (and not the Intercontinental gold). Kennedy was a close second option. Umaga would have been fine. Instead we got the safe option of Randy Orton and a feud with Triple-H and Shawn Michaels.

Stop me if you've seen that before.

Nothing against all these "safe" choices, as all but Khali have given me some wonderfully memorable performances in the ring, but now more than ever, it's time for Vince McMahon to step outside the box in his thinking. Start showing us that some unexpected stars really do have the opportunity to emerge from the mid-card ranks; the first step in doing that is allowing talented mid-carders to dominate other talented mid-carders now and then. Then show us that those wins really mean something. Why not give one or both Hardys a shot to see what they can do atop the mountain?

Triple-H isn't going to pull Raw out of its slump. I don't think Randy Orton will, either. Chris Jericho could

be more of a short-term fix. Batista and Undertaker are solid picks to main-event for Smackdown. I'm getting sick of solid, though.

Remember a little more than a decade ago, when WWE was losing top stars to WCW left and right? McMahon got shoved out of the box then and responded by ushering in the most profitable and arguably the most exciting era in professional wrestling history.

Well, he's been losing top stars left and right again. They'll all be back soon enough in this case, but biding time until that happens isn't an acceptable plan anymore. We don't want any more 2.8s. Anyone for Hardy vs. Hardy, title vs. title, at WrestleMania 24? Sounds crazy, sure, but maybe crazy is what's missing from WWE right now. □

Raw is begging for something new to jumpstart fans' engines who have grown tired of the same old matches. Jeff Hardy vs. Ken Kennedy and Matt Hardy vs. MVP are old hat, but Hardy vs. Hardy could be an idea so crazy it just might work.



THUMBS UP



Thumbs Up to C.M. Punk. Punk is the model of persistence in ECW. After months of near-misses, the "Straight Edge Superstar" finally captured his first piece of WWE hardware, defeating John Morrison for the ECW title. Punk has competed admirably since making the leap to the ECW brand from OVW, and the man shows no signs of slowing down. Belt or not, Punk remains one of the most compelling competitors on the entire roster and seems destined for greatness. In the meantime, the straight edge champion should continue to set the bar for the ECW brand.

Thumbs Up to Triple-H. When the Raw brand began to look like the Orton-Cena show, Triple-H came back to restore some order to the WWE world. After suffering his second major quad injury, "The Game" returned triumphantly at SummerSlam and never looked back,

cutting a path of destruction while rebelling against the establishment in old-school Triple-H fashion. While some may have grown weary of the same old shtick, there's something fresh and appealing about this incarnation of the "Cerebral Assassin." Now, with Cena out of action due to a torn pectoral muscle, it seems that Triple-H's return couldn't have happened at a better time.



Thumbs Up to Hornswoggle.

Sometimes the pot at the end of the rainbow is filled with gold; other times, it's overflowing with stock options, film libraries, and bushels of cold, hard cash. The newest McMahon family member, Hornswoggle, certainly found the luck o' the Irish when it was revealed that he was the illegitimate son of Mr. McMahon. The man once best known for spending his time under the ring is now the heir apparent to one of the richest men in the world. On top of that, the fans are embracing the former punchline as one of their own, as Hornswoggle bounces and grunts his way into their good graces.



Thumbs Up to Karen Angle. It's not that she has been revolutionary in utilizing her feminine wiles to manipulate the men of TNA to fall prey to her every demand, but there's something devilishly

clever about the way Karen has entranced the TNA roster and the fan base. Karen's TNA debut was emotionally devastating as the seemingly mistreated mother, forced by her power-hungry husband to live forever in his massive shadow. Fast forward only a few months, and the faux damsel in distress has become so dangerous to everyone not named Angle that Sting had to take out a restraining order against her. For her quick rise to the top, she deserves our cautious praise.



THUMBS DOWN



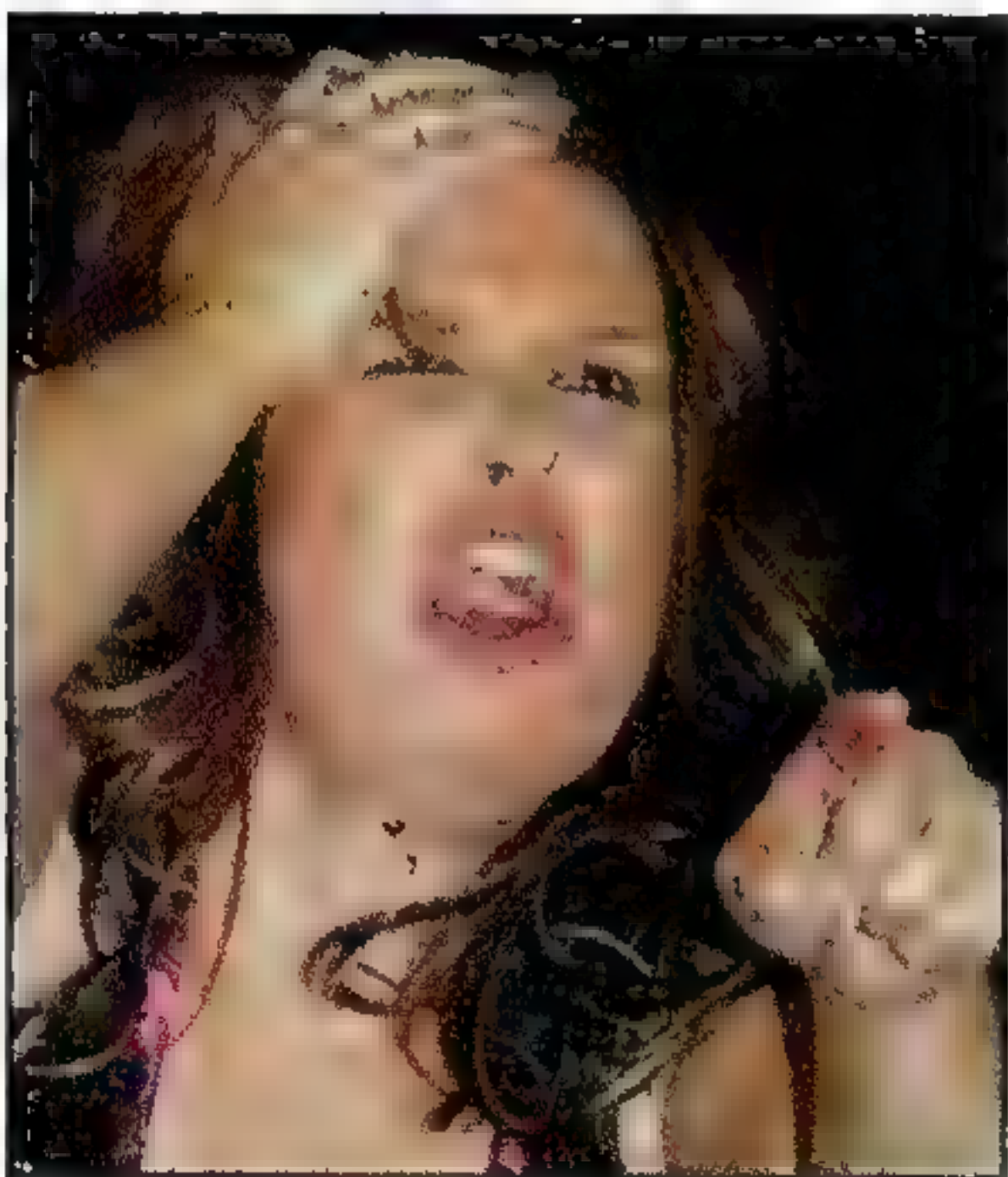
Thumbs Down to Black Reign. Today, he's fighting for those who can't defend themselves; tomorrow, he'll snuggle up next to a rat. To say Black Reign is an enigma is an understatement. Dustin Rhodes has a knack for the obscure, as much of his career has been marked by adopting strange, semi-androgynous personas and making them his own. Still, there's something lacking to this most recent abnormal chapter in Rhodes' career. Whereas his past personalities possessed drive and determination, Black Reign appears content with just creeping people out for the sake of, well, creeping people out. And associating with Raven doesn't dispel any of the weirdness, either.

entity seems to be in the best position to further his career. In short, Striker is a top-class rulebreaker straight from the old-school mentality. Everything he touches seems to turn against him at some point. His New Breed compatriots won't return his phone calls, and his current prodigy, Big Daddy V, seems close to squashing Striker at a moment's notice. While his approach is questionable, it's his long-term well-being that concerns us most.

Thumbs Down to Matt Striker. Striker *could* be a very talented wrestler that the fans would love to get behind. Instead, he has chosen to antagonize the fans, skirt the rules, and attach himself to whatever



Thumbs Down to Vickie Guerrero. Sure, it was a travesty to wrestling purists everywhere, but there was something to be said about the cruiserweight title reign of Hornswoggle McMahon. Unfortunately, Smackdown's interim general manager, Vickie Guerrero, stripped the ring-dwelling leprechaun of his gold and the cruiserweight division of its intrigue. Following Theodore Long's devastating heart attack during his wedding ceremony, Mr. McMahon named Guerrero the permanent general manager. Absolute power tends to do some sinister things to those who possess it, and, given her track record, things don't bode well for the competitors on the Smackdown roster as long as Guerrero is in charge.



Thumbs Down to Jonathan Coachman. It's one thing to make a competitor's life difficult, but Mr. McMahon's executive assistant, Jonathan Coachman, crossed the line when he brought John Cena's family into his personal vendetta. In early-September, Coachman drew John Cena Sr. further into his son's feud with Randy Orton by scheduling a match between Mr. Cena and Orton that amounted to little more than a public beatdown. What was worse, John Cena Jr. had a front-row seat to the "match," as he was handcuffed to the bottom rope and forced to watch his rival abuse his father in the middle of the ring. Shame on you, Coach.



P O I N T:

HORNSWOGGLE WAS A GOOD CHOICE FOR VINCE'S ILLEGITIMATE SON

BY BRANDI MANKIEWICZ

IT'S BEEN A long time since I had a chance to debate my Uncle Matt in a forum where he could feebly fight back in his geriatric manner. I hope he'll stay sober long enough to finish a thought. Hell, hopefully I can stay sober, too.

I know that I'm probably in the minority, but I enjoyed the swerve of Hornswoggle being given DNA attachment to the McMahon silver spoon. Honestly, people, how can you not love a midget? One of my favorite old-school wrestling mantras is "midgets equal ratings." It's always true. Everyone loves to see the little guys run around doing their thing. It's about time that one of the wee ones gets a chance to step up into the spotlight with a kick-ass angle. It's instant celebrity—notoriety even for a wrestler who otherwise would not have had a chance to get a big payday without Jerry Lawler re-forming his midget brigade from the 1990s. Without that piece of paper linking him to

the McMahon fortune, Hornswoggle would have been a blip in a WWE fan's afterthought.

I, for one, enjoy that we finally have proof of talent in the McMahon family. Think about it: We've endured years of Shane O'Mac pretending to be a bad-ass son who can wrestle. Now we finally have a McMahon son who is a bad ass and can wrestle. Whether or not Vince likes it, his new son has more wrestling talent than the kids he had with Linda. I'm thinking that Hornswoggle's mom was probably either a female wrestler introduced to Vince by the greatest female trainer in the world, Fabulous Moolah, or Momma was a bouncer at a bar. Either way, she is responsible for the genes that bring the fight to back up the mouth given to him by his daddy's genes. Shane and Stephanie are both good at talking, but actually wrestling, well, not so much.

Regardless of how ridiculous this angle may seem to you "smart" fans, I suggest giving it a chance. With all of the horrific crap that has been going on in wrestling this summer, it's about time this sport gets back to having fun. We all need the chance to laugh and enjoy something without having to think about how this angle will affect the future of the sport or if it will end with Congress sticking its nose in a place where it doesn't belong. Just tune in and enjoy it. It won't hurt you to pay attention to something that isn't supposed to be a serious subject. Take this farce at face value and use the downtime to let any open wounds heal.

Just remember: Midgets equal ratings ... and fake relatives make for fun times.

Brandi Mankiewicz is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER.



Senior Writer Brandi Mankiewicz believes Hornswoggle's induction into the McMahon clan finally gives credibility to the McMahon offspring. Stephanie and Shane, she feels, have always been a let-down in terms of their wrestling ability. Lil' Hornswoggle makes up for their shortcomings.

C O U N T E R P O I N T:

WWE RUINED A GOOD ANGLE BY TURNING IT INTO A PUNCHLINE

BY MATT BROCK

GREAT. STU SAKS pulled my niece away from YouTube long enough to make me debate her in print. I'm surprised that she's still allowed to vent her depraved opinions in a public forum. I figured the feds picked her up by now for being an all-around wreck with a computer. I guess Dan Murphy was too fat and bloated from beer and tacos to write the other half of this column. I gotta remind Stu that Eddie Ellner might be available to write again if we can find him. I have a feeling that Liz Hunter knows where that yoga-loving nut-cruncher is. Gotta remind myself to ask her for a number on him.

I should have known that she'd side with Hornswoggle in this horrible angle. There really is no way to take this whole situation seriously. This is not the time for WWE to be going back to the days of the cartoonish wrestlers like Bastion Booger or Mantaur. No good can come out of this. Think about it. Today's wrestling fans are more sophisticated and bloodthirsty than those of 20 years ago. They've already seen the bar raised high by the old ECW, Japan, and Ring of Honor, matches that are strong in style and deliver with blood, bruises, and athleticism. Hell, even regular sports fans enjoy a more hard-fought style for everything from football to hockey. It explains how the Ultimate Fighting Championship is all the rage now with the kids. Fans today want their primal instincts fed, not entertained by some pseudo leprechaun with a phony pedigree.

Sure, there have been fake family members in wrestling history. The one example that comes to mind right now is Ric Flair being the cousin of Ole and Gene Anderson. But the difference between the McMahon-Hornswoggle family ties and the Flair-Anderson family connection is that Ole and Gene introduced Flair into the Crockett territory as their cousin as a way to make the fans instantly hate him. Otherwise, those fans might have sided with Flair because of his ability and charm. But that was then. I doubt

today's fans would accept it since they could jump on their computers and debunk the family ties with one trip to some stupid Internet site.

Hell, there had to be a better choice out there on the WWE payroll. Vince being Triple-H's dad was one I would have preferred. Imagine how that would disrupt the McMahon family dinners, knowing that Vince's precious princess, Stephanie, married her half-brother. It would certainly have led to more interesting consequences than this pick.

Matt Brock is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER. □



Contributing Writer Matt Brock could not disagree more with his niece. Brock sees the illegitimate son storyline as a potentially great angle wasted on a punchline. In this era of cynical fans, such angles just won't fly.

INTRODUCING

SHIIMA XION

"SHIIMA XION IS a 20-year-old, raunchy, androgynous Filipino supermodel from hell." At least that's what rising indy star Shiima Xion says about himself.

A model since childhood in his native Philippines, Xion is always willing to share his thoughts on a number of topics, himself being the most prominent. Xion also admits that he has a catty, arrogant attitude. He is a very over-the-top, albeit shallow, individual who also happens to be just a touch effeminate.

But it's not all clothes and hair for Shiima Xion. The man is also a model wrestler. Dressed in garments from the finest Filipino sweatshops, the bulky 5'8", 170-pound Xion is looking to be not just America's next top model, but also America's next top wrestling superstar. "I know it's off the wall, but the character is all me," he said. "I was very much influenced by all of the glam rock and hair bands of the 1980s. I always wanted to be a rocker, but, because of my modeling career, I never quite had the time to make it. The transition to wrestling, though, seemed even more natural."

Xion was introduced to wrestling while on location for a photo shoot in Tijuana, Mexico. It was there that he first saw Mini Chucky in AAA (a midget wrestler known for masquerading as that lovable doll of *Child's Play* fame). He had an instant appreciation for the outrageous appeal of wrestling. Only 14 months later, Xion was in the ring himself, making regular appearances for Black Diamond Wrestling in Wheeling, West Virginia.

Throughout it all, Xion has had some pretty decent trainers. A product of Super Hentai, Shirley Doe, and Glenn Spectre, he has also studied under Jake Roberts, Tracy Smothers, and Chris Hero. After

Photo by Chris Maverick

BY BRADY HICKS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

about a year competing in western Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and Texas, Xion went on to return to his native Asia Pacific for a tour of Japan while part of the DDT promotion. He met Dick Togo during one of those visits. Xion credits Togo with helping to teach him the lucha libre style.

Using his "From Lust To Dust" snapmare driver, Xion has gained quite a reputation in his home promotion, the Pittsburgh-based International Wrestling Cartel, as well as IWA Mid-South, Full Impact

Pro Wrestling, Pro Wrestling Unplugged, Combat Zone Wrestling, and several promotions in Canada and Japan. In the IWC, Xion regularly joins forces with Jason Gory in a team known as Babyface Fire. The pair enjoyed a reign as IWC tag team champions earlier in the year.

Yet Xion has gained plenty of experience outside of the IWC. He has grappled with ROH standouts such as Nigel McGuinness and Matt Cross. He's also flown around the ring against TNA X division stars such as A.J. Styles and Chris Sabin.

"TNA could use some personality in the X division, and I could bring a really fun character to their shows," said Xion. "I've been knocking on TNA's door for a while now. I'm just waiting for them to answer it." And don't even get him started about a ROH contract. "Those fans would probably kill themselves if I got signed by Ring of Honor," he said. "But I can hold my own. And I would sell my soul for a contract with one of those two. It's too bad that I'm not a British mat technician or a Japanese strong-style warrior."

The Filipino supermodel confesses that



Photo by Timothy A. Walker

Shiima Xion has battled some familiar names, including TNA's Chris Sabin, whom Xion has locked in a head-scissors. He has also wrestled A.J. Styles, Nigel McGuinness, and Matt Cross.

he has one particularly bizarre goal in his blossoming career. It is to wrestle the man formerly known as The Ultimate Warrior. "The intensity, the make-up, the tassels, I loved it all," noted Xion. "Maybe he didn't know how to wrestle, maybe he didn't have staying power, and maybe he was a little nutty, but he had some outrageous fashion sense. He was fabulous!"

Xion claims to be a Lamborghini in a land of Yugos—and that he is only just beginning to realize his potential as a wrestler. After all, "There was a time when people didn't think The Sex Pistols were good musicians," said Xion. "But they managed to become legendary and surpass all expectations. I would expect no less from Shiima Xion down the line."

Maybe tack on some big expectations to go with that big hair. □

Filipino supermodel turned American model wrestler Shiima Xion has a big ego to go along with his big hair and big ambition. No amount of hairspray can keep down Xion's quest for wrestling greatness

FROM BELL TO BELL



[Editor's note: Mike Quackenbush is a wrestler, promoter, and instructor who has been chronicling his life in the business for THE WRESTLER since 1998. In this issue, he is reminded of the real danger of concussions in the industry.]



In honor of Rocco Rock's ECW days, the annual Ted Petty Invitational culminates in a three-way match each year. This year, Mike Quackenbush beat Claudio Castagnoli and Chuck Taylor in the three-way tournament final.

EVERY YEAR SINCE the passing of Ted Petty (Rocco Rock), his friend and ECW compatriot Ian Rotten has made his promotion, IWA Mid-South, host to a 24-man tournament held in Ted's honor. The appropriately named Ted Petty Invitational has become the most watched independent singles tournament not just in the Central States region of the country, but across the American independent circuit as a whole. The most recent winners of the tournament include A.J. Styles (2004), Matt Sydal (2005), and Low-Ki (2006), who wrestles for TNA under the name Senshi. Trust me when I tell you that I am not ruining the rest of this story by mentioning the winner of the 2007 edition of the Ted Petty Invitational was yours truly.

To advance to the tournament final, I had to get past Billy Roc (an Indianapolis-area wrestler with a diverse acumen), Joey Ryan (the longest-reigning champion of California's Pro Wrestling Guerrilla), and Josh Abercrombie (an IWA Mid-South regular). The final round of the tournament is a three-way dance, an obvious nod to ECW. On September 29, I wrestled against frequent rivals Claudio Castagnoli and Chuck Taylor; I pinned Castagnoli and made Taylor tap out to the CHIKARA special. It was an emotional win, and the intense feeling of triumph was compounded when some of my finest students joined me in the ring to close the show.

The Ted Petty Invitational was not my first tournament victory. A few years back, I won a lightweight tournament in Germany, and in 2005, I emerged victorious in CZW's Best of the Best tournament. As recently as February 2007, my hand was raised at the end of CHIKARA's King of Trios tournament, where I teamed with my protégés, Jigsaw and Shane Storm. So the experience was not as unique as it was the first time around for me. The win, I don't mind telling you, was truly something special, something rare, and something riskier than my usual fare.

In the second round of the tournament, while flying out of the ring onto Joey Ryan, my feet and legs clipped the top rope, and I collided with the arena floor, head-first. The next thing I knew, Ryan was back in the ring and I was being counted out, having been unconscious on the floor for several seconds. I didn't know where I was, or

BY MIKE QUACKENBUSH ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

PHOTOS BY NATHYN GIBSON

what was going on. It had been some six years and almost 400 matches since I last had a high-risk move backfire on me in this fashion.

On little more than luck and instinct, I advanced into the semifinals, but upon lumbering back to the dressing room area, I found myself at a loss to recall portions of the match I had just won. Also, my vision was fuzzy in the peripheral areas. Having had enough of them in the past to know, I realized quite immediately that I had incurred a concussion. The latter half of 2007 saw a brighter spotlight shone on concussions than ever before, especially in the world of professional wrestling. In a post-Benoit world, these types of injuries are the source of mounting concern. As the trainer of developing wrestlers, I am particularly aware of this.

Luckily for me, as the other tournament matches wore on, my vision cleared and my short-term memory returned. By the time my semifinal match arrived, I felt that I was able to continue. In reality, it was a chance I probably should not have taken, but I, like so many other wrestlers do every night of the week, went to the ring knowing that I was not 100 percent, and that my impaired health could come back to bite me in the end.

On this particular night in Midlothian, Illinois, the stars must have been aligned just right, or else it wouldn't have been me atop the turnbuckle raising my arms in celebration. When my music played one final time, and I was handed the IWA Mid-South heavyweight title, I felt a great sense of accomplishment, but in my mildly scrambled head, a malaise began to overtake my euphoria, as I knew a trip to see my doctor loomed in the imminent future.

Fortunately for me, after two consultations and one CT scan, the amount of time I was ordered to take off was a mere two weeks. My most severe concussion, suffered in March 1995, saw me sidelined for more than *three months*. By comparison, this seemed like a light sentence, thanks in no small part to my increasingly hard head. I had suffered a concussion ... and, in my mind, had earned 14 days of relaxation.

It may seem that my bull-headed persistence came with a mild downside, but for me, there was more to it than just the doctor's instructions. The two-week layoff meant canceling my planned Ring of Honor pay-per-view debut match, something I had been anticipating as a career milestone. In my younger, more foolish days, I sometimes thought heeding a physician's instructions was optional. If an injury couldn't keep me from walking to the ring under my own power, then it certainly wasn't worthy of any time off. The world in which both wrestlers and fans live has changed a lot since then. Immediate or not, the gravity of even a single concussion is one we cannot escape. And, as a trainer of so many up-and-comers, I now realize that ignoring the serious nature of head trauma is absolutely irresponsible. □



Accidents do happen even to the most seasoned veterans. Quackenbush has learned that repeatedly in his career ... and he learned it again on September 29, 2007. Leaping onto Joey Ryan in the second round of the TPI, Quackenbush's legs hit the top rope, and the resulting fall caused a concussion.

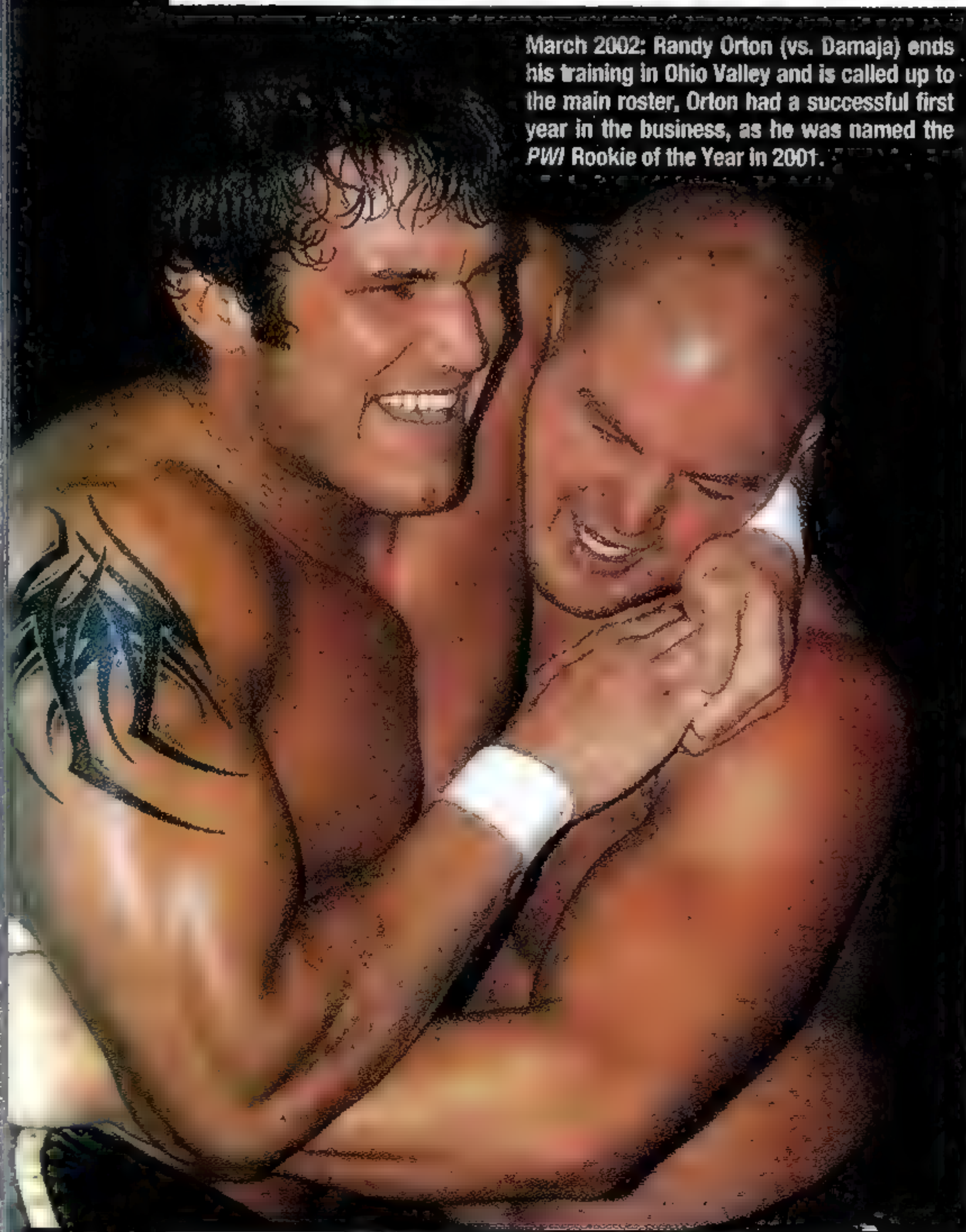
SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

RANDY ORTON

IN 2004, RANDY Orton became the youngest world heavyweight champion in WWE history. After a five-year roller-coaster ride through the company's ranks, punctuated by a series of high-profile wins and losses, Orton is ready to become champion once again ... Born on April Fool's Day of 1980 to mother Elaine and father "Cowboy" Bob Orton Jr. ... Often visited backstage at WWF events, getting to meet many of the men he'd watched his dad wrestle on TV ... Graduated from Hazelwood High School in Missouri ... Later, he signed up for the U.S. Marine Corps ... Kicked out of the Marines after going AWOL, and was then sentenced to serve 38 days in the brig

... Emerged from jail a bit humbler than before, and decided he wanted to become a wrestler ... Began training to wrestle in the St. Louis area in 2000 ... Randy's father supported his decision, and aided in his son's training ... WWE signed Orton to a developmental deal, simply on "Cowboy" Bob's word ... Relocated to Ohio Valley Wrestling to continue his training ... Wrestled in OVV for the length of 2001, twice winning the company's short-lived hardcore title ... Won the *PWI* Rookie of the Year Award in 2001 ... Was called up to WWE's main roster in the early spring of 2002 ... Debuted for the Smackdown brand in April ... Feuded with Hardcore Holly ... Tried to gain success as a fan favorite, but quickly learned it was not his style ... Was drafted to Raw, where he again tried to gain the approval of the fans ... Again, he was unsuccessful ... Faced Christian and Lance Storm in back-to-back matches on Raw ... Was injured during those bouts ... After announcing his shoulder injury and being jeered by fans, it was clear to Orton that he should return as a rulebreaker ... Late in his recovery period, Orton began interrupting episodes of Raw (and even pay-per-view broadcasts) with messages from the "Randy News Network" (or RNN) ... Gave weekly updates on his injury, and did a fine job of irritating fans ... With so much contempt coming his way, Orton was an ideal candidate to join Triple-H's Evolution faction upon his return ... Evolution exposed Orton to a vast new world of opportunity ... Became something of a playboy, earning the admiration of some female fans ... Quickly ruined this opportunity, however, by showing utter disrespect for his opponents ... Also assisted Triple-H in many tag matches and title defenses ... Entered the "Elimination Chamber" match at SummerSlam 2003 to help Triple-H fight off Bill Goldberg ... Was pinned by Goldberg after a spear ... Despite the loss, he helped "The Game" brutalize "Da Man" after the match ... Began attacking various veteran and retired wrestlers, dubbing himself the "Legend Killer" ... Threw Mick Foley down a flight of stairs at a Raw taping ... Feuded with Shawn Michaels ... This led to a match between the two at Unforgiven ... Orton won the bout, with the help of Ric Flair and a pair of brass knuckles ... Soon, he developed a new signature move—a version of the Diamond cutter, known as the RKO ... Used the RKO to pin Rob Van Dam for the Intercontinental title at Armageddon ... His championship reign lasted nearly eight months ... Feuded with the returning Mick Foley ... Entered the 2004 Royal Rumble, but was eliminated by Foley ... Teamed up

March 2002: Randy Orton (vs. Damaja) ends his training in Ohio Valley and is called up to the main roster. Orton had a successful first year in the business, as he was named the *PWI* Rookie of the Year in 2001.





RANDY ORTON

[THE WRESTLER]

25



January 2003: After gaining a considerable amount of heat on his own merits, Triple-H recruits Orton for his Evolution stable. With the growing admiration of female fans, Orton becomes the young playboy of the group.



August 2004: Taking the Raw World title from Chris Benoit at SummerSlam, Orton becomes the youngest WWE world champion ever. Orton's championship win causes a jealous Triple-H to eliminate him from Evolution.



August 2005: Thanks to help from his father, "Cowboy" Bob Orton, the "Legend Killer" finally slays "The Phenom" at SummerSlam after numerous failed attempts. A feud pitting both Ortons against 'Taker lasts through the fall.

with Evolution mates Flair and Batista to defeat the reunited Rock 'n' Sock Connection at WrestleMania ... Pinned Foley to win the match for his team ... They continued to feud over Orton's Intercontinental title in the following months ... This resulted in a series of memorable matchups, most notably a streetfight at Backlash ... Foley summoned up his Cactus Jack persona for the match, ruthlessly attacking Orton ... Overcame a horrendous beating, complete with a spill onto thumbtacks, to defeat the "Hardcore Legend" ...

In his book, *The Hardcore Diaries*, Foley would describe the Backlash bout as the best match of his career ... Fought off a variety of challengers to his Intercontinental belt to become the longest-reigning champ in 10 years ... Finally lost the title to Edge at Vengeance ... Bounced back rather quickly, earning a Raw World title shot against Chris Benoit at SummerSlam ... Tensions began to rise between Orton and Triple-H in the weeks leading up to that bout ... Won the match at SummerSlam, with the Toronto fans (surprisingly) in his corner, to become Raw World champion ... Was kicked out of Evolution the following night by a jealous Triple-H ... Began a run as a fan favorite ... Lost the title after only a month, dropping it to Triple-H at Unforgiven ... Defeated Ric Flair in a bloody cage match at the first Taboo Tuesday pay-per-view ... Led Team Orton to victory over Team Triple-H at Survivor Series ... Won 2004's Most Improved Wrestler of the Year Awards from both *PWI* and *The Wrestling Observer* ... Competed for the vacant Raw World title in an "Elimination Chamber" match at New Year's Revolution 2005 ... Pinned Batista in the match ... Ultimately, Orton was pinned by Triple-H, who won the bout ... Challenged Triple-H one more time at the Royal Rumble ... Lost the contest following a pedigree ... Was diagnosed with a concussion following the match ... Began to have a much harder time winning matches on Raw as a result of his injury ... Was dared by "Superstar" Billy Graham to seek out new challenges ... Took this to heart, and challenged The Undertaker to a match at WrestleMania 21 ...



November 2005: After being drafted from Raw to Smackdown, Orton represents his new brand against Team Raw in an elimination match at Survivor Series. He wins the match for Team Smackdown with a pin over Shawn Michaels.

Stacy Keibler (Orton's girlfriend at the time) questioned his decision, which led to her being planted by the RKO ... Fans immediately turned against Orton, and he began another run as a rulebreaker ... Was handily defeated by The Undertaker at WrestleMania ... Shortly after, Orton was drafted to the Smackdown brand, where he and 'Taker continued to feud ... Finally beat "The Phenom" at SummerSlam after repeatedly coming up short in previous attempts ... Was able to pin the "Dead Man" because of the interference of his dad, "Cowboy" Bob ... This led to a feud between Undertaker and both Ortons ... Together, the Ortons defeated Undertaker in a handicap casket match at

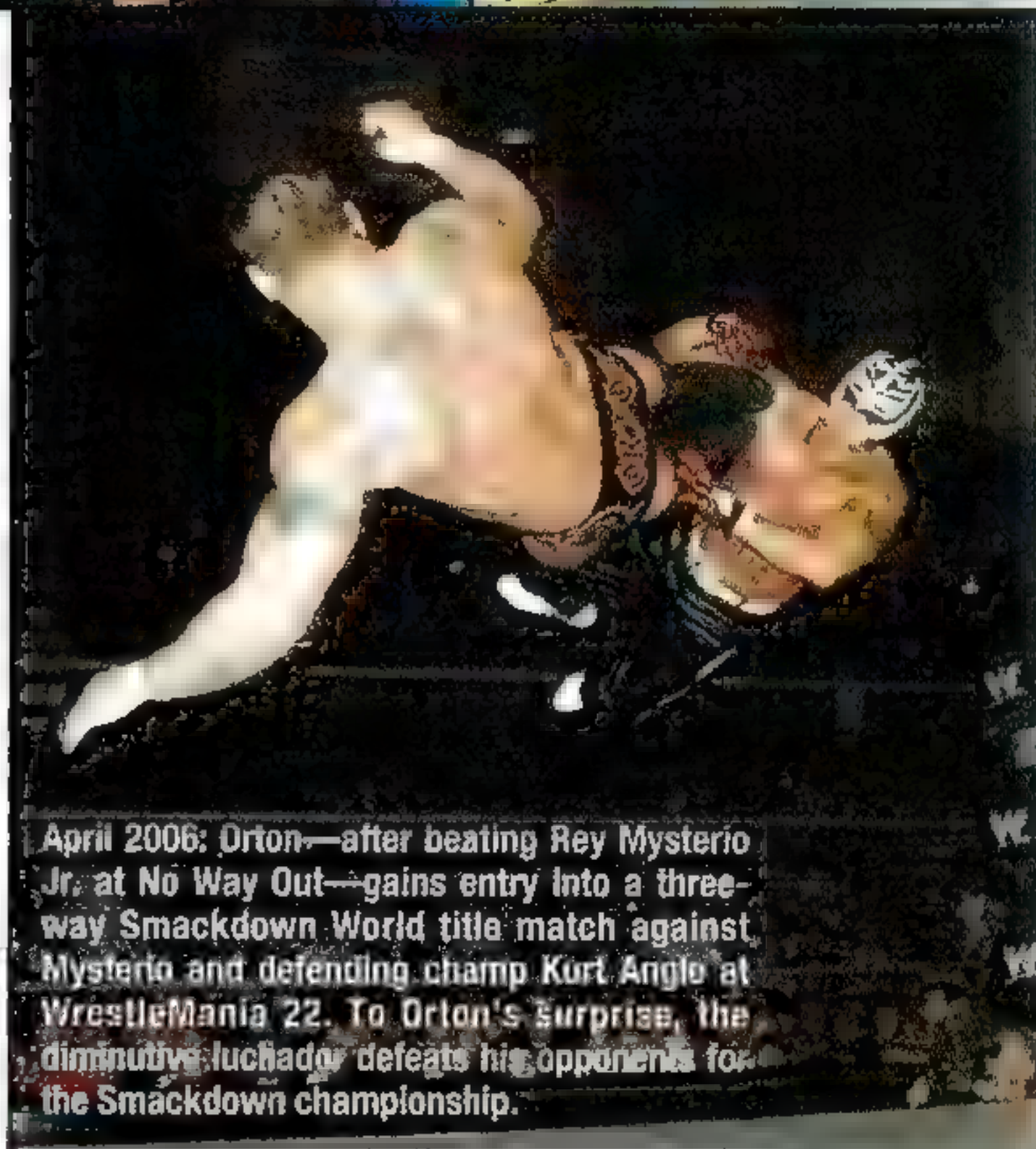


December 2005: Orton and 'Taker battle once more in a "Hell In A Cell" match at Armageddon, ending their feud. Unfortunately for Orton, the battle ends in defeat.

January 2006: After Booker T injures his knee during a best-of-seven series against Chris Benoit, Booker requests the aid of Orton, who wins the seventh match for Booker, giving "Book" the U.S. championship.

No Mercy ... Following the match, they set the casket—containing 'Taker—on fire ... Continued to compete, for a time, with his dad in his corner ... Was a part of Team Smackdown at Survivor Series ... Won the bout for his team by pinning Shawn Michaels ... Lost a "Hell In A Cell" match to Undertaker at Armageddon, bringing their feud—and 2005—to a close ... Stepped in to aid an injured Booker T in his best-of-seven series against Chris

Benoit, winning the U.S. championship for "The Book" ... Entered the 2006 Royal Rumble at number 30, but was eliminated by Rey Mysterio Jr. ... Later pinned Mysterio at No Way Out, winning Rey-Rey's WrestleMania 22 title shot ... That match was eventually turned into a triple-threat, with Orton and Mysterio taking on Smackdown World champion Kurt Angle ... Mysterio pinned Orton to win the Smackdown championship ... WWE slapped Orton with a 60-day suspension for unprofessional conduct outside the ring ... Returned to WWE two months later, answering Angle's open challenge at One Night Stand ... Angle won that match by submission ... Orton won the rematch at Vengeance ... Next sought out a feud with Hulk Hogan ... Antagonized "The Hulkster" by flirting with his daughter, Brooke, and then attacking him at *Saturday Night's Main Event* ... Lost to Hogan at SummerSlam ... Feuded with Carlito for a short time ... Teamed with former rival Edge to form Rated RKO ... Together, they targeted the reunited DeGeneration X ... Handed Triple-H and Shawn Michaels their first loss, since reuniting, at Cyber Sunday ... Eric



April 2006: Orton—after beating Rey Mysterio Jr. at No Way Out—gains entry into a three-way Smackdown World title match against Mysterio and defending champ Kurt Angle at WrestleMania 22. To Orton's surprise, the diminutive luchador defeats his opponents for the Smackdown championship.



July 2006: Orton brings an impostor Hogan family into the ring and flirts with the fake Brooke, goading the real Hulk Hogan into a match at SummerSlam. Orton would lose to Hogan in that match.



June 2007: Although Rob Van Dam defeats Orton at One Night Stand, Orton gets the final word after the match with an elevated DDT from the security barricade to the arena floor, effectively ending RVD's WWE career.



November 2006: Along with Rated RKO teammate Edge, Orton hands the reunited DeGeneration X (Shawn Michaels and Triple-H) their first loss since getting back together.



July 2007: The legend-killing continues as Orton dominates the "American Dream" Dusty Rhodes in a Texas bullrope match at the Great American Bash. This only intensifies Orton's rivalry with Dusty's son Cody.

Bischoff helped them get the win ... Two weeks later, Edge and Orton captured the Raw World tag team title from Ric Flair and Roddy Piper ... Triple-H, Shawn Michaels, The Hardys, and C.M. Punk steamrolled Orton, Edge, Gregory Helms, Mike Knox, and Johnny Nitro in an elimination match at Survivor Series ... Rated RKO fought DX to a no-contest at New Year's Revolution 2007 ... Triple-H was injured during the bout, and DX quietly disintegrated ... Meanwhile, Rated RKO began to fall apart as well ... Lost the tag team title to John Cena and Shawn Michaels ... Orton entered the eight-man "Money In The Bank" ladder match at WrestleMania 23, but came up short ... Lost a four-way Raw World title match at Backlash ... Finish came when he was speared by Edge, and then pinned by champion John Cena ... He and Edge collided in a memorable bout on Raw ... Returned to true form after a brief slump ...

Defeated Shawn Michaels at Judgment Day ... Sidelined "The Showstopper" with a hard yakuza kick to the head ... Began feuding with Rob Van Dam ... Lost to RVD in a stretcher match at One Night Stand ... Following the bout, he attacked RVD, apparently ending Van Dam's WWE career ... Targeted Dusty Rhodes ... Dominated Rhodes in a Texas bullrope match at the Great American Bash ... Singled out John Cena and the Raw World title ... Lost to Cena at SummerSlam, following an FU ... Made things personal by attacking Cena's father on the August 27 edition of Raw ... Defeated Cena by disqualification at Unforgiven ... With the feud at a fever pitch, a last-man-standing match was scheduled for No Mercy ... Orton was favored by many to capture the Raw World championship by 2008. □

Q & A

T E D D i B i A S E

"I've dealt with the temptations that all men face"

THE "MILLION-DOLLAR MAN" is one of the most memorable characters in WWE history. Ted DiBiase, with his evil laugh and manservant Virgil, breathed life into that persona and became a staple of the WWF from 1987 to 1993. He was also involved in some unforgettable storylines, from his attempted purchase of the WWF World title from Andre the Giant to his establishment of the "Million-Dollar championship."

But what has cemented DiBiase as a legend is the fact there was plenty of substance to go along with all that style. Yes, he might have delighted in bribing fans into doing humiliating things, and he might have reveled in his appearance on *The Lifestyles Of The Rich & Famous*, but DiBiase had indeed paid the price to be a superstar. More specifically, he had paid his dues in the Mid-South, Missouri, Georgia, and even during a late-1970s run in the WWF.

He was the adopted son of "Iron" Mike DiBiase, who died of a heart attack inside the ring in 1969. While "Iron" Mike's blood didn't run in Teddy's veins, the young man idolized his stepfather. In his 1997 autobiography, *Every Man Has His Price*, DiBiase detailed his relationship with his father and his mother, lady wrestler Helen Hild, who turned to alcohol after the death of her husband. He also chronicled how the excesses of life on the road almost destroyed his marriage.

Two herniated discs forced DiBiase to retire from in-ring action in 1993, and he quickly adapted to the role of manager in the WWF. In 1996, DiBiase accepted an offer from WCW and showed up on *Monday Nitro* as the benefactor of The New World Order. Eventually, though, DiBiase devoted more of his time to speaking about his renewed devotion to Christianity. After leaving WCW, DiBiase formed a new organization, Heart of David Ministry. In addition to creating the Power Wrestling Alliance, he also launched two websites, heartofdavidministry.com and milliondollarman.com.

He accepted a position in WWE Creative as a producer for the Smackdown brand in 2005. Although DiBiase was released 18 months later, his son—Ted DiBiase Jr.—has signed a WWE developmental contract and is training in

Florida Championship Wrestling. His oldest son, Mike, is recovering from an injured knee and hopes to return to action on the independent circuit in the near future. Ted Sr. and his wife, Melanie, also have a teenaged son, Brett. Currently, Ted is working on a WWE-authorized autobiography tentatively titled *Ted DiBiase: The Million-Dollar Man*.

"DiBiase was one of several '80s stars who took what he had learned in the Southern rasslin' territories and used those skills on a national scale in the WWF," said Editor-in-Chief Harry Burkett, who conducted a 90-minute interview with the second-generation star. "He was a real workhorse in the ring, a consummate professional. And, during my interview with him, I found him to be straightforward and reflective. I'm not surprised that he approaches his faith with the same passion that he once reserved for wrestling."

Q: Since your departure from WWE, you've been doing a lot of speaking engagements for Christian groups and men's groups, including Promise Keepers of Canada. What was your most recent engagement and what was your message?

A: This weekend, I spoke at a men's meeting in Fenton, Michigan, about 60 miles north of Detroit. As a minister of the Gospel, I challenge the attendees to be men of God, good fathers, and good husbands. I challenge men to have lives of integrity, character, truthfulness, and honesty, basically trying to get men out of that "macho man" syndrome and realize there is more fruit in being in service to others rather than in service to self.

Q: When did you first hear a calling to spread the Word?

A: My faith goes back to my childhood. As a young man, I had strong faith and that carried me through my father's early death at age 45, when I was only 15 years old. My mother's alcoholism also became a burden. I ended up moving to a small town in southern Arizona with my grandparents. At the same time, I was blessed that God gave me the talent to earn a football scholarship and go to college. I was in good shape, spiritually, until about age 18.



DiBiase's big break came in February 1978 when he upset Dick Slater for the Missouri State title. Although DiBiase's first reign lasted only two weeks, he defeated Ken Patera for his second Missouri title in November 1980 and held the belt for 10 months.



"Iron" Mike DiBiase, grinding Buddy Rogers with a headlock, was an inspiration to his adopted son (above). The elder DiBiase's sudden death inside the ring in 1969 was a life-changing event for the youngster. DiBiase's mother, Helen Hild, was a wrestling star in her own right (below).

Then, what controlled me for the next 20 years was male pride and ego. It was all about Ted. I believe God wants you to be ambitious and use all your talent, but it should be used not to glorify us, but to be in service to others and—more importantly—to glorify Him.

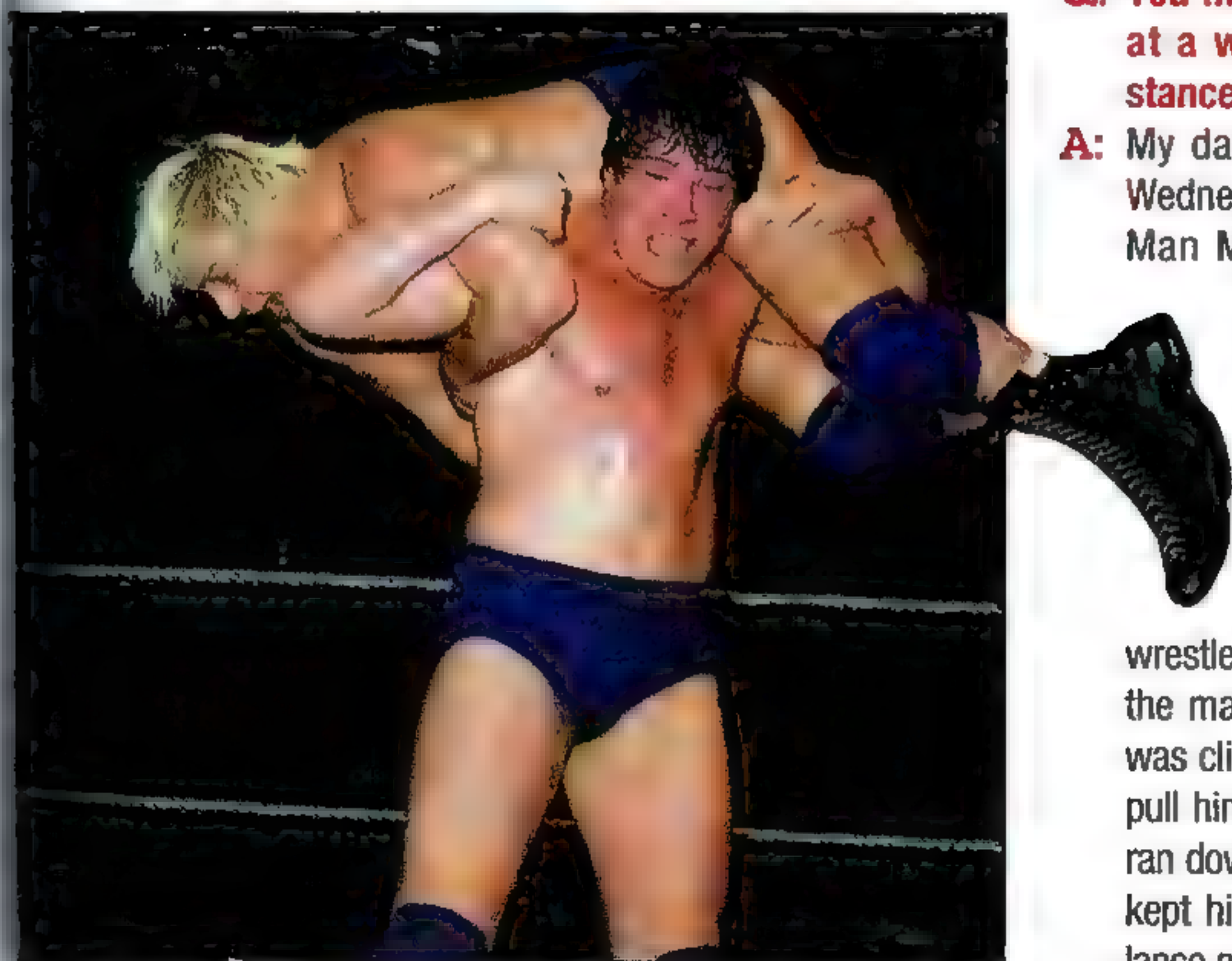
My first marriage, which produced my oldest son, Mike, failed after six years. Then I married a wonderful girl named Melanie on New Year's Day 1981. I almost lost her, too. But God also blessed me with Teddy and Brett, and I got Mike back when he was 13. Yet, in spite of everything I was blessed with, I had that ego thing, man. Wrestling became the god in my life, and I was trying to become the character I was playing. Despite being a big star for the WWF, making more money, the action figures, the public appearances, I wasn't satisfied. I filled that void with



"I was in good shape, spiritually, until about age 18. Then, what controlled me for the next 20 years was male pride and ego. It was all about Ted."

drugs, alcohol, and other women, to the point of nearly losing my wife and family. I was extremely selfish and self-centered.

That all changed when I was confronted by my wife, who knew I'd been unfaithful. In that discovery, I realized in a flash what I'd put at risk and realized how selfish I'd been. I was living my life not to satisfy anyone but myself. I risked the love and devotion of a wife, and the stability and well-being of my children, and for what? To be a self-serving jerk on the road. So that was the turning point, in 1992, right after WrestleMania VIII. I turned back to the God of my youth. And everything in my life changed. Everything was restored. Melanie and I are still together, happier than we've ever been. I have a wonderful relationship with my children. Along the way, as I leaned more heavily on God and faith, I realized that God would be able to touch other lives through my message and life experience. My message is that I've had all the material rewards, been there, done that. I've dealt with the temptations that all men face. And here's the answer: Jesus Christ. And my life has been great for the past 15 years.



Entering the WWF as the North American champion, DiBiase went on to have an intense series of matches against Pat Patterson, including this November 1979 bout in Madison Square Garden. Patterson is no match for babyface DiBiase's airplane spin.



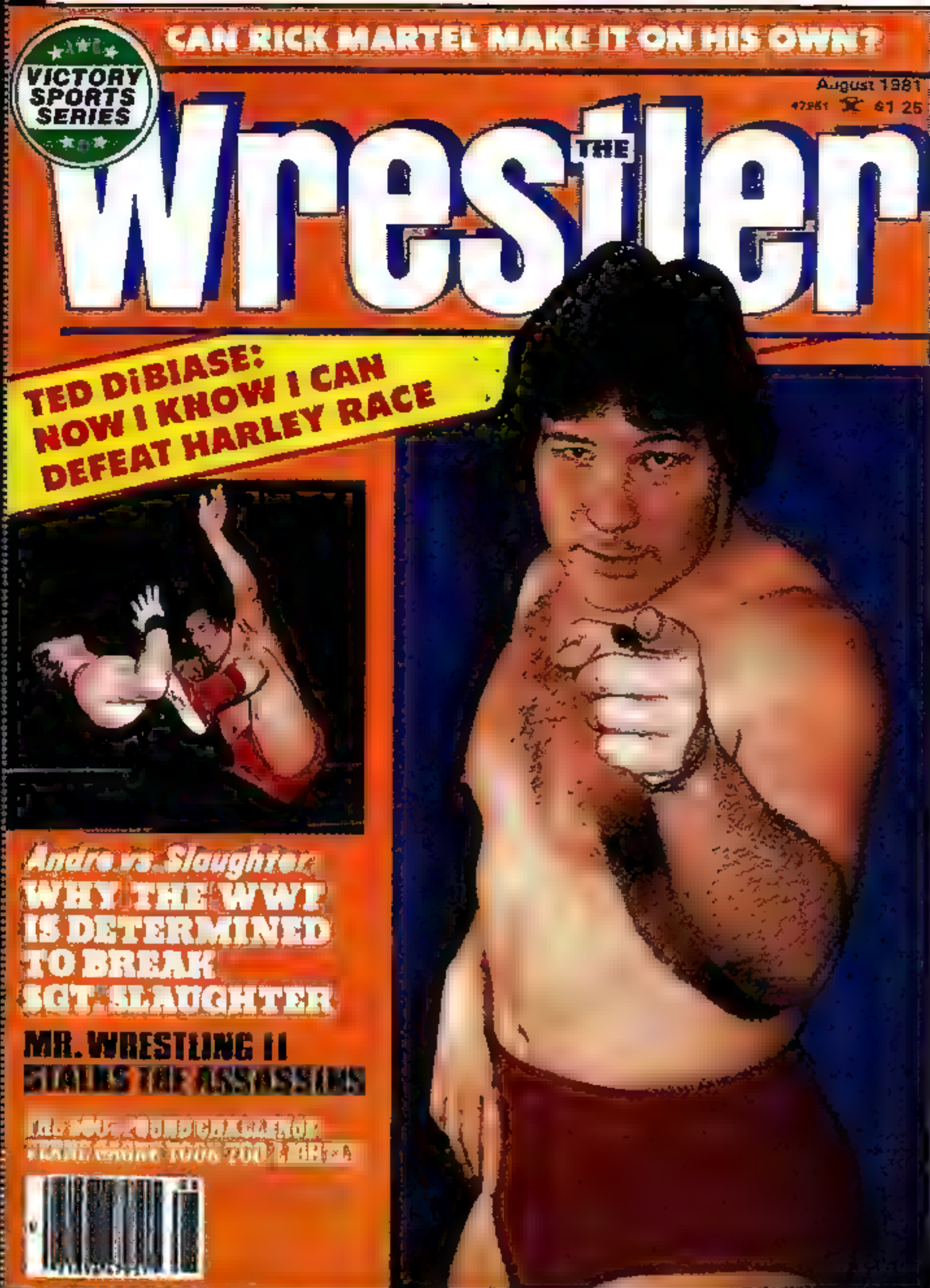
Q: You now have an organization called Heart of David Ministry. What was your original vision for that and how has it taken shape?

A: It is named after David, who slew Goliath. David loved God, had strong faith as a young man, became the king of Israel, and then he fell. He committed adultery, lied to cover it up, and was ultimately confronted by what he'd done. His response was immediate repentance, and God restored him. I identified greatly with David. In spite of his frailties, living in the flesh, David wanted to please God—and God knew that. Heart of David Ministry encourages people to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's for people like me, who've had unbelievable success yet found emptiness, and people who just come to a place of no hope and no place to turn.

Q: You mentioned the death of your father. He died at a wrestling event. What were the circumstances of his death?

A: My dad was wrestling in Lubbock, Texas, on a Wednesday night, July 2, 1969. His opponent was Man Mountain Mike. We had just moved from Nebraska to Texas and had been in Amarillo for only a month. We weren't happy with the apartment, so we spent the day moving furniture from one place to another. He didn't get much rest and was called to a meeting, and then he had to get in the car and travel to Lubbock, Texas, to wrestle. Basically, my dad had a heart attack during the match. He had been thrown out of the ring and was climbing back in. He grabbed the second rope to pull himself into the ring and just let go. Harley Race ran down to ringside, tried to resuscitate my dad, and kept him alive. He still had a pulse when the ambulance arrived, but it was slow in coming. They got him to the hospital, but he died on the table.

Q: That's almost eerie because Harley was on hand when Owen Hart died.



While he claimed to know how to beat NWA World champion Harley Race in the August 1981 issue of *THE WRESTLER*, DiBiase never secured the 10 pounds of gold. He was seriously considered for a run with the title, though.

A: Yeah, he was.

Q: Wasn't Mike your stepfather? Helen Hild was your biological mother, right?

A: My biological mother divorced when I was two. My mother had been in show business. She was a choreographic dancer in stage shows. I can't remember exactly when she began wrestling. Lady wrestling was a lot more glamorous in the '50s than it is now because television was brand new and the ladies were treated like movie stars. She met Mike on the road and they fell in love. They were married on October 2, 1959. I was four years old at the time. Later in life, after Mike's death, I got to know my real dad better. But, for the formative years of my life, the man I aspired to be was Mike DiBiase. I was legally adopted and carry his name proudly.

Q: You said that you won a football scholarship. I assume that was for West Texas State.

A: Yes. Initially, I signed a letter of intent for the University of Arizona. But I was watching TV one day, and I caught the wrestling show out of Amarillo. That inspired me to

go down and visit The Funk Brothers and Dory Funk Sr. I hadn't seen him since my father's death in '69. In the early spring of '72, Terry Funk suggested that I visit West Texas State University before I made a decision. Both Terry and Dory Jr. had attended West Texas.

I suppose, in the back of my mind, I always wanted to wrestle. And, getting around people in the wrestling business and around what I had been comfortable with for most of my life, I decided to go to West Texas State. A lot of people were shocked that I chose West Texas over a much larger university. It's interesting, though, that about 14 guys from West Texas became not just wrestlers, but stars in our industry.

Q: And that's all the more interesting when you figure that most of those wrestlers came from that specific era in the mid-1970s. Who were some of the guys that you remember from campus who went on to become a big deal?

A: The only two guys who were actually on campus at the same time as me were Tully Blanchard and Merced Solis, who is better known as Tito Santana. And the weekend I was recruited by WT, I met Stan Hansen, who was a graduate assistant at the time. After I left West Texas, Kelly Kiniski, Barry Windham, and Manny Fernandez went to school there.

Q: What role did the Funks have in your training? Were they your hands-on trainers or were other people more directly involved?



DiBiase's other North American title reigns occurred in the Mid-South, where he had dominant runs as a fan favorite and heel. His betrayal of Junkyard Dog, and his subsequent North American title victory, made him the *PW!* Most Hated Wrestler of the Year in 1982.

"Basically, my dad had a heart attack during the match. He had been thrown out of the ring and was climbing back in. He grabbed the second rope to pull himself into the ring and just let go ... They got him to the hospital, but he died on the table."



A: Wrestling was so different in terms of training back then. In those days, it was more like an apprenticeship. You learned the basic moves and falls, and they would throw you into an opening match in a little town. You were put in the ring with somebody who would lead you by the nose. When you progressed, you were put in the opening match in the bigger towns.

Q: You're right, the promoters really believed in throwing you in the fire at the start. In an interview a few issues ago, Magnum T.A. told me that his first match was on television.



Although the two started out as friends on the campus of West Texas State University, DiBiase and Tito Santana crossed paths in the ring in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. Here, the despised DiBiase chinlocks Santana in a 1983 match in Houston.

A: I didn't wrestle on TV in my first match, but I did substitute for somebody who didn't show up for a match in El Paso, Texas. I wrestled a guy named Akio Sato. I also refereed for two summers. In fact, between my junior and senior years in the summer of 1975, Dick Murdoch suggested that I go to the Mid-South to see if I really wanted to be a wrestler. I thought it was a great idea, but in hindsight, it was probably the worst thing I could have done. Everything went so well that I didn't go back to school, and I still regret that. In my first match there, I was put on television against Danny Hodge.

Q: Now that really is straight into the fire. Would you consider your Missouri title win to be your first big break in the wrestling business?

A: Yes. I had wrestled in the Mid-South for about a year and went to Texas for a short time. I had been to Kansas City, but not St. Louis yet. Sam Muchnick, Bob Geigel, and Harley Race were the owners. St. Louis was a one-city territory, and guys came all over the country to wrestle there. This was the era before national television, so the only way the wrestling world found out about you was through the magazines. Once you became a name in St. Louis, you had national magazine coverage and other promoters found out about you. I was one of the few Missouri State titleholders who didn't end up the NWA World champion.

Q: I find it interesting that even Bob Backlund—a future WWF champion—held the Missouri title.

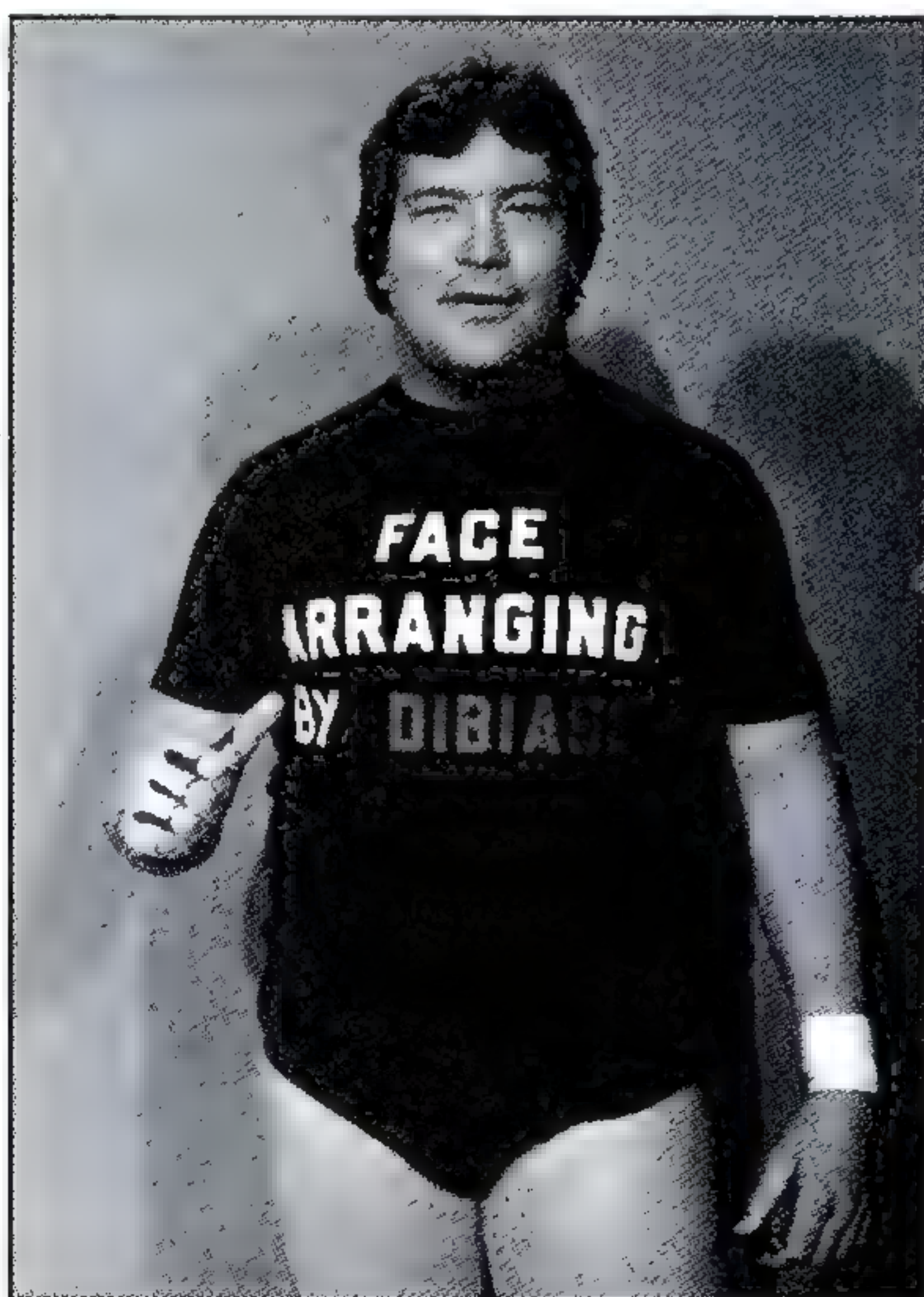
A: Right.

Q: What was your favorite territory back in the '70s and early-'80s?

A: Mid-South, simply because Bill Watts was brilliant. Like a lot of brilliant promoters of that era, he learned from Eddie Graham in Florida. Graham was one of the sharpest around in terms of ring psychology. Watts came back to Oklahoma, which was run by Leroy McGuirk. Watts went on to merge Oklahoma into the Mid-South, which already consisted of Louisiana,



As if breaking Bob Armstrong's face weren't bad enough, DiBiase went on to attack the veteran at every opportunity, even with a helping hand from his crony, Mike George (above). "Terrible Ted" basked in his villainy (below).



Mississippi, and Arkansas—it was a huge territory. Some of the talent that came through was phenomenal. I was exposed to a lot of good wrestling and great psychology in my first year in the business.

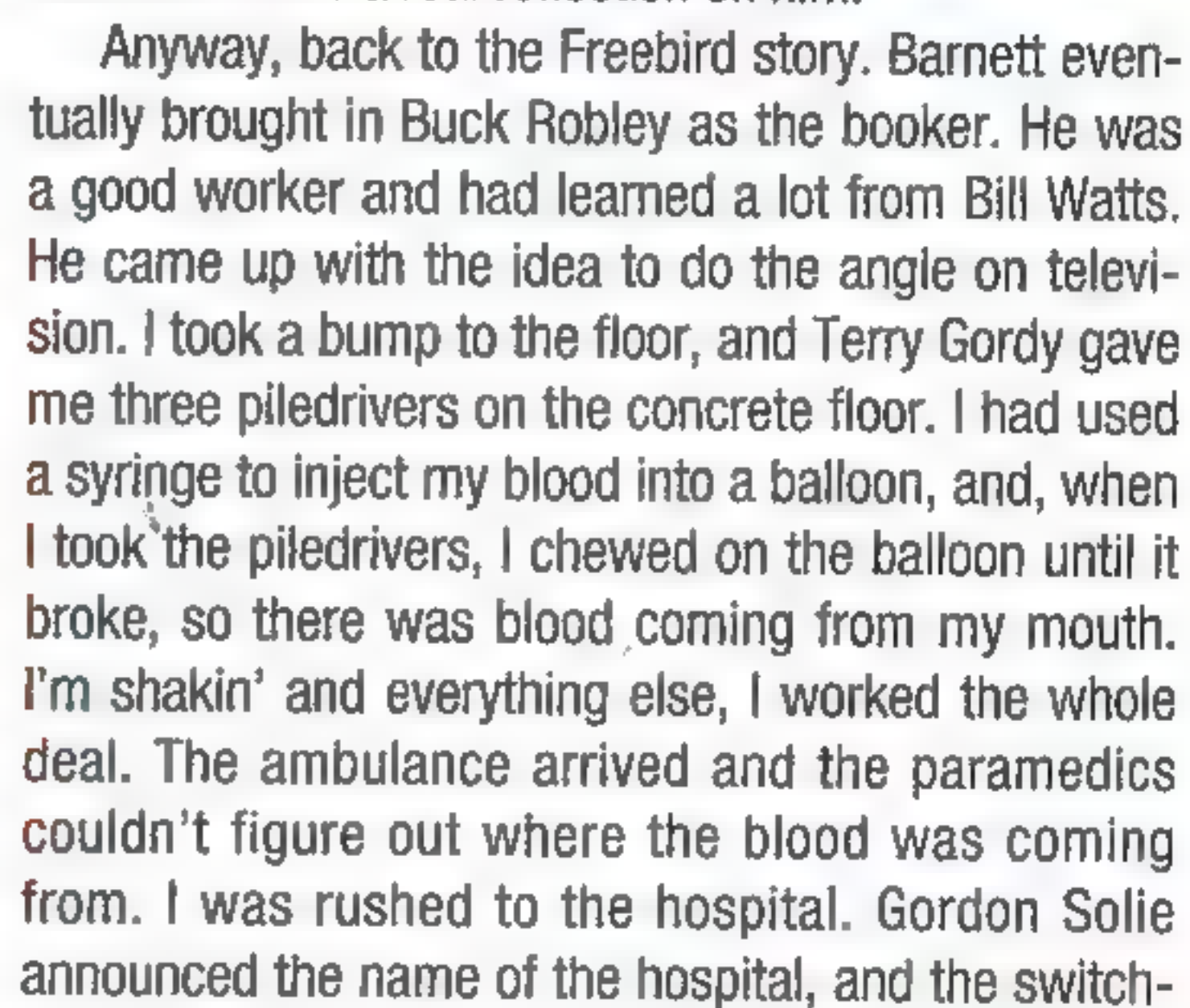
Q: Speaking of great ring psychologists, Pat Patterson is best known for being the first WWF Intercontinental champion, but both you and Pat held the WWF North American title. How would you describe your first run in the WWF?

A: When Vince McMahon Sr. first brought me to New York, he established—for the very first time—a secondary title to go along with the WWF heavyweight championship and the WWF tag team championship. He brought me in as the North American champion. In conversation with him, I let Vince Sr. know that Bill Watts had the same title in Mid-South. Vince didn't want to step on Bill's toes, and he wanted to be different, so I dropped the North American title to Pat Patterson on television to set up Pat's run with Bob Backlund. Then, in an effort to change the name of the belt, he invented a story that Pat Patterson went off to Rio de Janeiro and entered a tournament with the North American title and emerged as the Intercontinental champion.

Q: You mentioned that you were one of the few people who held the Missouri title who didn't springboard to the NWA title. I've heard that you were seriously considered for a run with the NWA belt, but that too many people found out ahead of time. What's the story?

A: Sometimes I get blamed for this, and I shouldn't be. At the time, the powers-that-be might have thought I was running around with a big mouth and telling people that I was in line for the belt. Actually, the Funks, the Briscos, Harley Race, Bob Geigel, and others told me to move to Atlanta and get on national cable. They

A: Stan Frazier. He had no business in a ring. It was the most hideous thing I'd ever seen. That might have been a time when I was guilty of saying things I shouldn't have. At the time, I was going back and forth to St. Louis. They asked me, "How's Atlanta?" I told them the truth when I should have kept my mouth shut. I said, "Robert Fuller couldn't find his butt with both hands, let alone book a territory." I'm sure



DiBiase defended the National title against Tommy Rich in a series of matches throughout Georgia, and many of them became bloodbaths. With his loaded glove and sharp teeth, DiBiase proved to be a ruthless sadist.

Teaming with fellow West Texas State alum Stan Hansen, DiBiase enhances his standing in the Orient with an impressive run in All Japan's tag team division in 1987. Six years later, DiBiase and Hansen would win the All Japan International tag team belts.



As the "Million-Dollar Man" in the WWF, DiBiase liked to flaunt his cash in front of the camera. He used his money to buy the services of Andre the Giant and Virgil ... and even attempted to buy the WWF World title!

board lit up, and I got a sack full of mail from across the country. So, I did interviews from the hospital bed, interviews from my apartment, and eventually interviews from the gym while I was working out to make the big comeback.

Q: Did you find it hard not to break while you were in the hospital, or did you think the whole thing was kind of funny?

A: I enjoyed the whole deal. When anybody came in the door, I complained about the pain. When I was in the room by myself, I took it easy and watched TV. They kept loading me with pain medication the entire time.

Q: That wouldn't be very comforting to me! After your run in Atlanta, you returned to the Mid-South, where you became a heel and formed The Rat Pack. That was quite a change for you. Did you enjoy being evil?

A: I became a heel in 1982 because so many had left for the WWF. Paul Orndorff, Jake "The Snake" Roberts, and The Samoans had all come and gone. Junkyard Dog was still there, so we needed a real strong heel. I got to thinking about it: Who would ever think I would

[illegible]

According to the angle, I had apparently hurt my hand and had to wear a special glove. I wore it on TV for weeks, and I was still the same Ted DiBiase that everybody loved. Then I was scheduled for what was supposed to be a friendly match for Junkyard Dog's North American title. That night, I took a big bump over the top rope to the floor. JYD stops the match, goes outside—just like a good guy—to help me up and roll me back in the ring. I rolled into the middle of the ring, and, as he's climbing in, I reached down and load the glove. When he goes to pick me up, I knocked him out with one punch and—one, two, three—I became the biggest heel they ever had.

A photograph of a professional wrestling match in progress. Two wrestlers are in the ring: one wearing red trunks and the other wearing black trunks with red and white designs. They are surrounded by a large crowd of spectators. A referee in a white shirt and dark pants is visible on the right side of the ring.

A close-up photograph of a man with dark hair, a beard, and glasses. He is holding a large fan of US dollar bills in front of his face, partially obscuring it. The bills are fanned out, showing various denominations. The man is wearing a dark jacket. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

A: I'll tell you how that came about: Bob Armstrong was on a bench working out with a bar of weights. The bar

slipped out of his hand and a weight fell on his face, it literally dropped on his head.

Q: That sounds like a pretty serious injury.

A: It was a pretty serious injury. So they capitalized on that by making up a story and blaming it on me. And it worked [laughs].

Q: Your final run in the Mid-South had a storybook ending because you turned back into a fan favorite. Your tag team with Steve Williams was especially popular, and the two of you had a lot of chemistry. How would you describe the chemistry between "Doc" and "Teddy"?

A: Doc had come out of the University of Oklahoma, and Bill Watts put me with Doc to help groom him. It's hard to put into words ... Doc and I just clicked. Mike Rotundo and I clicked in the same way. I had turned babyface again during an angle with Flair and Murdoch on TV where I basically gashed myself to the bone and bled all over everything. That's when Bill tagged me with Doc, and we had a great run.

Q: One thing I liked about that era was that angles were true morality tales. Our magazines lauded fan favorites and condemned wrestlers for turning heel. There was Mr. Wrestling II, the "Paragon Of Probity." Now a fan favorite like Triple-H is hitting people with a sledgehammer. The bad guys are cool, and good guys act bad. What do you think about that?

A: I encountered that when I went back to WWE in a creative role. Being a minister, I had a conversation about this with Stephanie McMahon. I said, "I don't have anything against Steve Austin personally, he's not a bad guy at all, but I don't care for this persona where he's flipping everybody the bird and guzzling down beer. Kids idolize him. I don't know about you, Steph, but I don't want my kid to think that's a hero." Stephanie said, "Ted, neither do I. But we didn't do that. The public did." I understand that WWE is in the business to make money, because the livelihoods of hundreds of people depend on it. But what does that

say about our society? I don't want to get real religious on you, but look back to Rome. Toward the end, they were cheering for a lot worse than wrestling matches and ultimate fighting at the Colosseum.



DiBiase's favorite WWF match occurred at WrestleMania VI at the Toronto Skydome, where he battled former Mid-South rival Jake Roberts. He and Roberts exhibited a chemistry reminiscent of Flair and Steamboat.



Two weeks after WrestleMania VI, DiBiase gets his crack against new WWF World champion The Ultimate Warrior at a supercard promoted by the WWF, All Japan, and New Japan at the Tokyo Dome. All the money in the world couldn't buy the Warrior any talent.



A: Absolutely. When he first got into the business, he was very respectful and very courteous to me personally. But they pushed a guy to the top and didn't make him earn it. And he forgets the only reason he is a star is because the guys have made him look like one.

A: The company flew me everywhere first-class. At the baggage claim, Virgil would take my bags off the cart and load them into the limousine. We lived it, man. But once we got to the hotel, Virgil and I would



The "Million-Dollar Man" hooks a cobra sleeper on Hulk Hogan at WrestleMania IX in Las Vegas. He and Irwin R. Schyster (Mike Rotundo) retained the WWF World tag team title by disqualification against Hogan and Brutus Beefcake at the event.

part ways. Fans would come to the hotels after the matches, and I'd always sign autographs. But I didn't sign autographs at the building, because I stayed in character immediately before and immediately following the show.

Q: Who was your best opponent in the WWF?

A: I loved working with Jake Roberts because he made it so easy. In spite of his personal problems, Jake was a tremendous wrestler and a master of psychology. We didn't have to hardly talk. We just did it, and it was



DiBiase knees Razor Ramon (Scott Hall) in the corner during the opening bout of SummerSlam 1993. This loss to Ramon turned out to be DiBiase's final in-ring appearance for the WWF.



Although DiBiase's neck injury reduced him to a managerial role when he returned to the WWF in 1994, he didn't hesitate to lay the boots to The Undertaker during this match at SummerSlam. The Million-Dollar Corporation would become a true force in the WWF.

good. I was in WrestleManias IV through IX, and had even headlined WrestleMania against Randy Savage, but my favorite was WrestleMania VI in Toronto because Jake and I had such a good match.

Q: When did the problem with your neck begin?

A: Actually, my neck was never in pain. The pain was in my arms and hands. I wrestled my final WWF match against Razor Ramon at SummerSlam in 1993. Then I went to work in Japan. They tagged me up with Stan Hansen again, and, my first night there, we won the All Japan International tag team belts. Toward the end of that tour, I took a bump and pain shot down both of my arms. It went away, and I thought it was a freak thing. Then it happened so often that I got an MRI. The doctor said I had two herniated disks and recommended that I retire.

Q: Were you expecting that?

A: No. The doctor said I could probably have the surgery and go back to work, and chances were that nothing would happen, but I could also get dropped on my head and be paralyzed. I know a lot of wrestlers who had the same surgery I had, and they returned to the ring and have been okay. But I retired for two reasons: One, I had very good disability insurance at the time.

"I went to Bischoff one day and said, 'Eric, I know you're the boss and you're running the show ... But I didn't spend 20 years building a career so I could end that career as Hulk Hogan's belt-bearer.'"

Two, I was about to turn 40, and, remembering that my dad died in the ring at age 46, I didn't want the same to happen to me. So I retired. I tried physical therapy for a long time, but finally had the surgery done, with the two discs taken out and two bone chips being grafted from my hip and inserted into my spinal column.

We all make personal choices. I went on TV with Larry King and Greta Van Susteren when the Chris Benoit thing went down and stressed that it wasn't Vince McMahon's fault that guys are dying of drug and alcohol abuse. Vince isn't a babysitter. All you can do is implement a strict drug-testing policy and you're gone after three strikes. And, if you're making \$200,000 a year and aren't smart enough to start your own retirement fund, then you're stupid. Again, it's all personal choice.

Q: Was it a hard decision to jump from the WWF to WCW?

A: It really was. In reality, I didn't want to leave the WWF, but I felt like I didn't have a choice. I had



returned to the WWF in '94 in a manager and commentator's role. As a commentator, I had to go to Connecticut and be in the studio for a day or two. Once every three weeks I went to the TV tapings. I didn't have to take the physical poundings anymore, but I was still able to work in the business I'd known all my life. And I got to spend plenty of time with my family.

When Sid Vicious came on board, Vince took me out of the broadcasting booth and put me back on the road with Sid. He wanted me to help Sid along and help groom him. He said, "It might be good to have someone with Sid to help him keep both oars in the water." I'd heard the story about the scissors fight between Sid and Arn Anderson in England, and



With charismatic performers such as Hollywood Hogan, Scott Hall, and Kevin Nash, The New World Order didn't really need a spokesman. According to DiBiase, he was frustrated by his limited role as Hogan's "belt-bearer."

Arn was my friend, so I didn't know what to think of Sid. But I got along with him very well. But, being back on the road again, I decided that wasn't where I wanted to be. Hindsight being 20/20, I wish I had talked to Vince about it at the time.

But I had an offer from WCW, where I could make more money and be on the road less. I accepted the offer from WCW. So, I showed up at the TVs for the WWF and Vince told me I could finish up that day.

Q: You at least had a chance to wrap it up storyline-wise, didn't you?

A: They came up with the idea that my man, Steve Austin, would wrestle Savio Vega. I vowed to quit if Austin didn't win. Austin lost, and I was outta there.

Q: It struck me as a graceful exit. How did you like WCW? One problem is you were put with the NWO, which was full of good talkers already.

A: It was a great idea in terms of the ongoing storyline. It made sense that the former "Million-Dollar Man" would be the financial backer for the NWO.

Q: "Billionaire Ted"!

A: Yeah, that was pretty cool. But your point is exactly right. All those guys were good talkers, anyway. The best place for a manager is with someone who can't talk. They didn't need me. And, to be blunt, Eric Bischoff saw how popular it was getting, and he put himself in my role. I was still there, but I wasn't saying anything. I went to Bischoff one day and said, "Eric, I know you're the boss and you're running the show. And if you want to put yourself in my role, that's fine, because my money is still the same. But I didn't spend 20 years building a career so I could end that career as Hulk Hogan's belt-bearer. If you don't have anything for me to do, send me home. When you figure out what you're going to do with me, bring me back." Eric said I was right, and I went home for a while.

Meanwhile, I was starting to appear on *The 700 Club* and Christian television. I was uncomfortable with the idea of viewers seeing me on one channel espousing Christian values, and then flipping the channel to see me betraying my faith. So I eventually told Eric that he ought to think about switching me. Instead of putting me with a character, though, he put me with The Steiners, who were already over. Why? With Eric, too, we're talking about somebody who was in a role that he didn't deserve.



DiBiase enjoys meeting longtime friends such as "Dr. Death" Steve Williams at various reunion events (above). They're able to reminisce about old times, including their highly successful run as Mid-South tag team champions in the mid-'80s (below).



"My greatest gift is my innate ability to work. The real art of wrestling is working, not going out there with a preplanned set of things to do bell to bell. 'Working' is making that masterpiece happen as it happens."



Q: Did it ever bug you that Hollywood Hogan wore a crucifix when he was doing evil deeds, such as spray-painting people?

A: No, I hadn't noticed he was doing that. Well, there's a lot of people who wear the cross who don't know what it stands for. But, as far as my time in WCW, I didn't enjoy it at all.

Q: Do you think WWE Creative had any qualms about you coming in as part of the team, considering that you had a reputation as a straight-laced guy? After all, they probably didn't think you were cutting edge.

A: No, I didn't have a problem with that. When Stephanie hired me, I reminded her that I'd been outspoken about the programming. I'm forever grateful to the company for the best years of my career, but I told her I would be vocal when I think the programming is crossing a line. My opinion is there's too much flesh on WWE TV. But, by the demographics, they can show that girls sell wrestling. Vince has always said that you're entitled to your opinion and free to speak your mind, but since his money is paying for it, then he's ultimately going to do what he wants.

Q: Why were you released from WWE Creative?

A: Because it took them a year-and-a-half to figure out that I'm not creative. That's not my gift. My greatest gift is my innate ability to work. The real art of wrestling is working, not going out there with a preplanned set of things to do bell to bell. "Working" is making that masterpiece happen as it happens. People would ask why I did certain things in the ring. Often, I didn't know. I just knew to do it.

Q: You have three sons: Mike, Ted Jr., and Brett. Mike and Ted are already wrestlers. When did they let you know they wanted to get in the wrestling business?

A: I don't think they talked about it much. They knew I was adamantly against it, just as my dad was against me getting into the business. Remember, I was out of the business from 1999 until 2005. When I went back, and realized how dramatically the corporate end of WWE had changed, I had a change of heart. That's

why I got so bent out of shape over the Chris Benoit thing. Lots of the allegations against WWE might have been true 15 years ago, but it is a much different company now.

Q: That's because, back then, Vince and everybody else was flying by the seat of their pants on a roller-coaster that no one had experienced before.

A: Exactly. Now there is a firm corporate structure. They have updated the drug-testing policy. Today, the guys are not overworked. They work only four days a week unless they're on tour, and, in that case, everything's paid for. When I realized it was different, I told my boys to go for it. But I told them they shouldn't do anything to compromise their faith. If you're asked to do anything to compromise your faith, leave.

Q: Of course, Ted Jr. has signed a developmental contract.

A: He's loving it so far. I'm getting good reports from Steve Keim, who runs the school in Tampa, as well as Tom Prichard. Bruce Prichard, who's been with the company for years, told me he's a natural. In his last report to the office, he described Teddy as a young Randy Orton. That's high praise, considering Randy is about the best in the business right now.

Q: I understand that Mike hurt his leg.

A: He hurt his knee, and he's back in Texas, where my ex-wife lives. Both Mike and Teddy trained with Harley Race in Eldon, Missouri. Mike plans to work some independent shows when he's well enough.

Q: I have one final question for you: Does every man have a price?

A: Every man does indeed have a price. The bottom line is that we all pay a price for the choices we make in life. We make choices every day that will determine our destiny. As a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, I believe there is a price for our sins ... and that price has been paid by the blood of Jesus Christ. □

BATISTA'S BOMB

"If I Don't Beat Undertaker, My Title



SHELL!

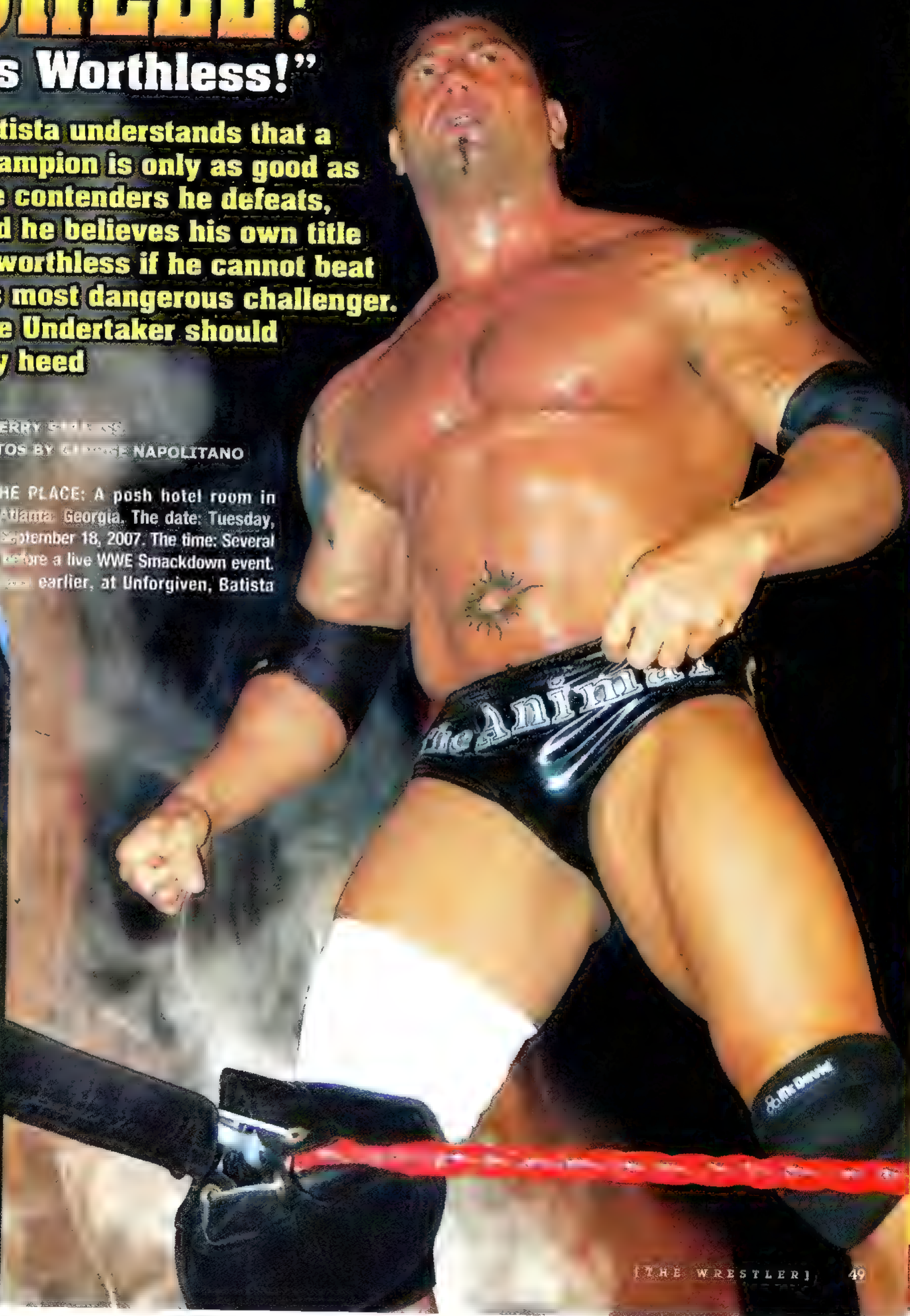
Is Worthless!"

Batista understands that a champion is only as good as the contenders he defeats, and he believes his own title is worthless if he cannot beat his most dangerous challenger. The Undertaker should pay heed

BY GERRY SPINALE

PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

THE PLACE: A posh hotel room in Atlanta, Georgia. The date: Tuesday, September 18, 2007. The time: Several hours before a live WWE Smackdown event. Just a few days earlier, at Unforgiven, Batista



accomplished his long-standing goal of regaining the Smackdown World championship. After months of hard work and frustration, "The Animal" was back on top.

So why wasn't he acting like it?

"You know, these past few months have been very tough on me mentally," the champion explained while sliding a DVD into his laptop computer. "I knew I could be World champion again. I knew I *should* be World champion again. Edge and Khali both found ways to slow me down, but I knew I'd get here eventually."

"The thing is," Batista continued, "I don't want to simply be a champion anymore. Hell, when Edge was champ, everyone knew I was better than him. Same with Khali. They were champions waiting to be beaten. That's not me. I want to be the guy that nobody bets against. I want to be the guy who can beat *anyone*."

A video plays on Batista's laptop screen, taking him to another time and place, revealing exactly what is on his mind.

Detroit, Michigan.

April 1, 2007.

WrestleMania 23.

The Undertaker.

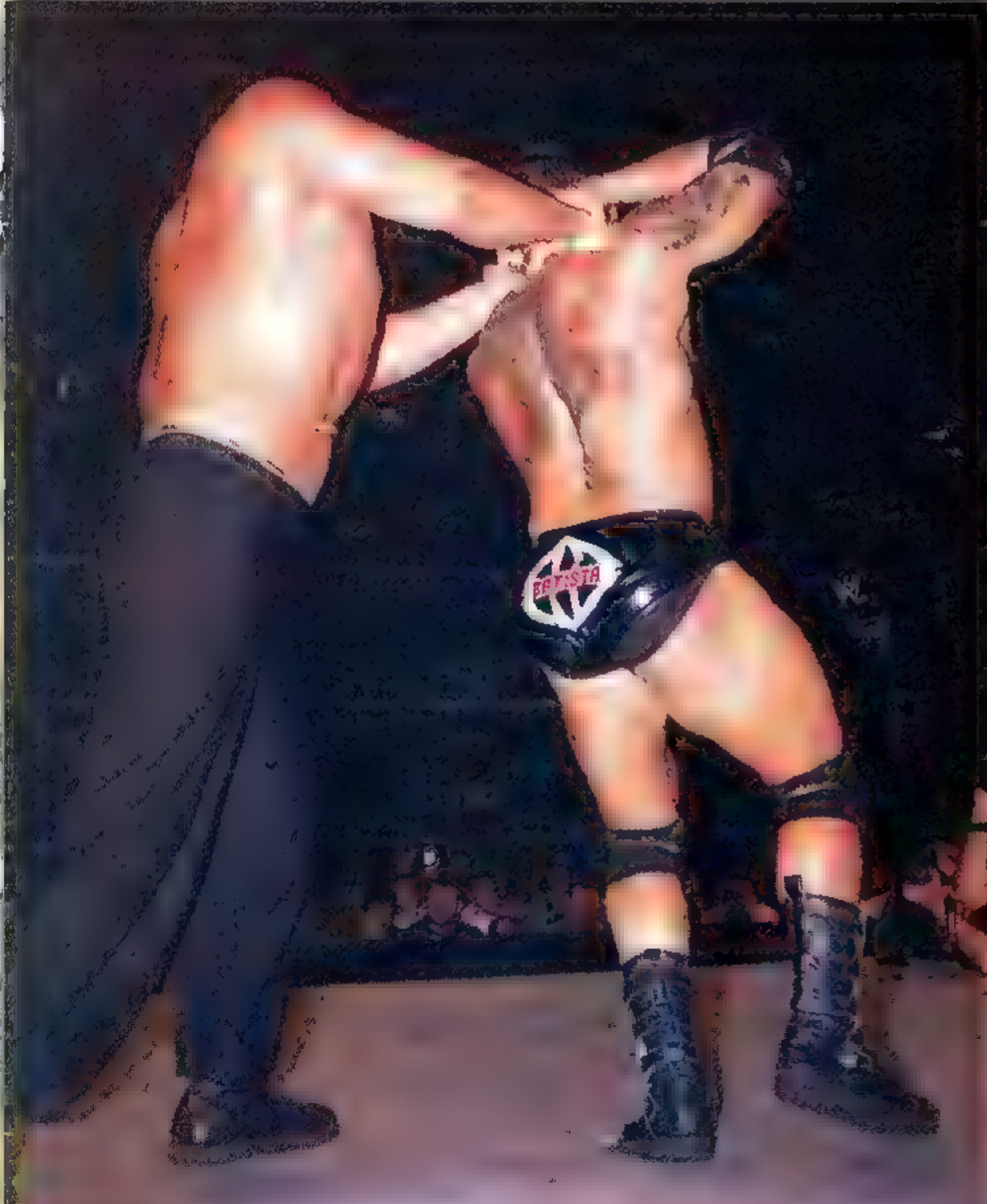
Indeed, this year's 'Mania was the site of Batista's biggest match ever ... and, perhaps, his greatest defeat.

"I'll admit it. I was intimidated," shrugged "The Animal."

"First of all, 'Taker has that untouchable aura around him,



Batista was admittedly intimidated by a combination of factors during his 'Mania 23 match against The Undertaker. Not only did Batista have to endure the legend's aura of invincibility, but he also took on 'Taker's seemingly invincible WM streak. With that psychological baggage, it's no wonder that Batista lost the Smackdown World title to "The Phenom."



A 7'3" giant is bound to slow down even the most dedicated competitor. In the end, "The Animal" slew Khali and reclaimed his rightful spot atop Smackdown. But now another threat is back and gunning for the title, and The Undertaker has more skill than the Punjabi.

always has. Then, factor in the pressure to break his undefeated WrestleMania streak. It was a tough situation, man. Honestly, I may have walked into that match as champion, but I definitely felt like the challenger."

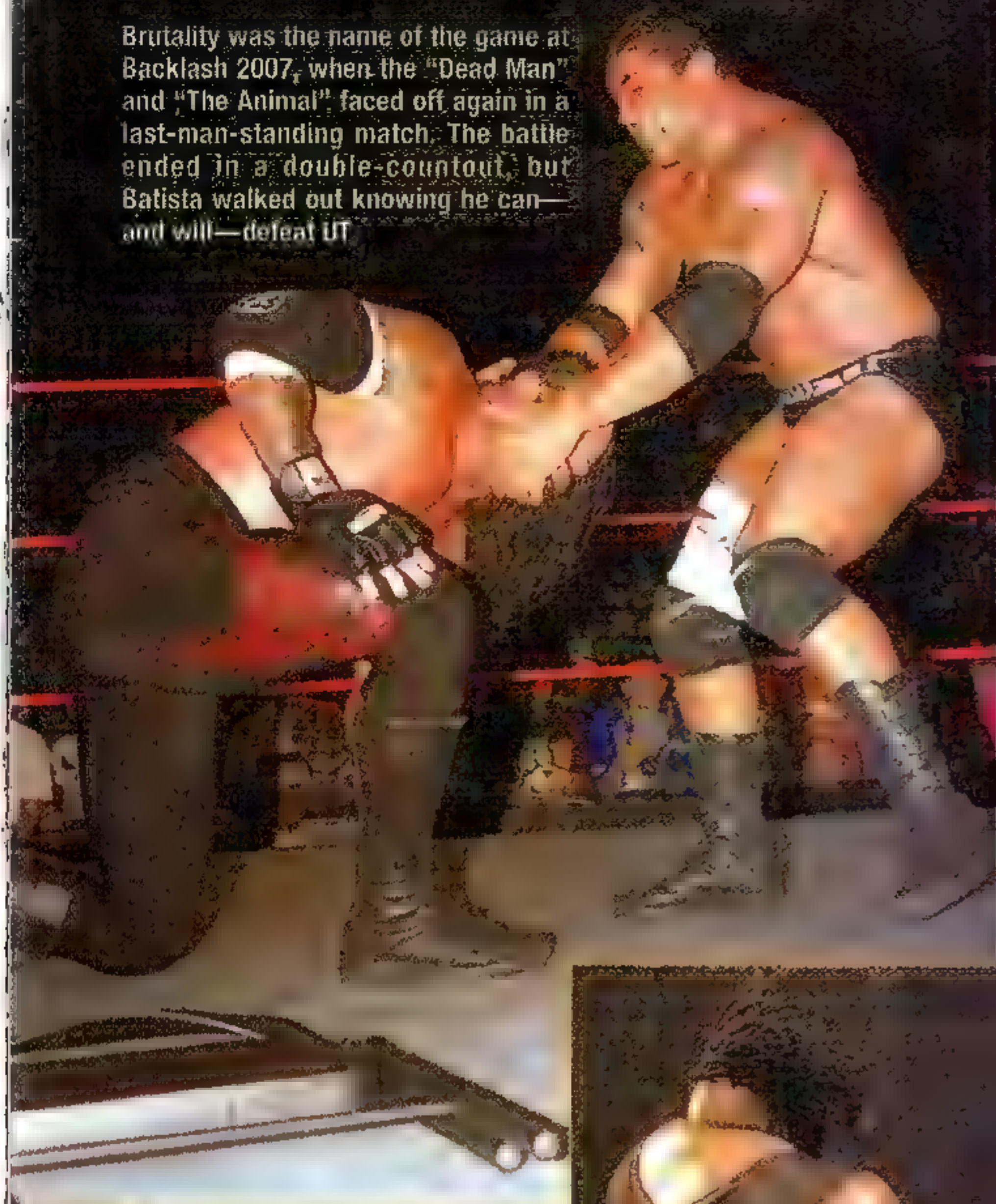
Despite the pressure, Batista battled Undertaker on even ground, resulting in one of the most hard-hitting matches in WrestleMania history. Move for move, power to power, neither man wanted to give an inch. On this night, however, the "Dead Man" was the better man, cleanly scoring the pinfall after a tombstone piledriver. Undertaker's undefeated WrestleMania streak remained intact ... and Batista's championship reign was not.

"I have no one but myself to blame for that loss," said a somber Batista, moments after re-watching the final minutes of that match. "I was so mindful of The Undertaker's legacy, I forgot about my own. I was trying to rise to the occasion, when I should have realized that I was the occasion. I was the World heavyweight champion, and there's no way I should ever have taken a backseat to anyone ... not even The Undertaker."

One month later at Backlash, Batista signed for an even more brutal encounter ... a last-man-standing match. The two behemoths went after each other even more ferociously, each determined to punish his opponent until he could not answer the referee's 10-count, either inside or outside the ring. This time, though, something was different.

"After 'Mania, I had a lot of time to think," explained Batista. "I thought about just how close I came to beating The

Brutality was the name of the game at Backlash 2007, when the "Dead Man" and "The Animal" faced off again in a last-man-standing match. The battle ended in a double-countout, but Batista walked out knowing he can—and will—defeat UT.



Batista reclaimed the Smackdown World title at Unforgiven, the same event where The Undertaker gained revenge against Mark Henry (right). Batista knows it's only a matter of time before UT targets the belt.

Undertaker, even with all the odds against me. I finally realized that I had what it took to stand up to him, man to man."

And stand up to him he did, refusing to succumb to the new champion's hardest shots at Backlash. In the end, champion and challenger simultaneously took each other out of the match, earning a double-countout.

"I'd never taken such a beating before," Batista continued. "But I also never dished out such a beating before. I felt like I was in a car wreck afterward, but I also never felt better. Right there, I knew I was a changed man. It was time to fight my way back to the top."

Throughout the summer, Batista fought through cage matches, injuries, and a series of failed attempts at regaining the gold. This time, "The Animal" never let his setbacks get him down. Instead, he chased even harder, continually fighting his way through all the obstacles back to the top contender's slot.

"Throughout the summer, Batista fought through cage matches, injuries, and a series of failed attempts at regaining the gold ... One obstacle that Batista did not have to worry about for several months was The Undertaker."

One obstacle that Batista did not have to worry about for several months was The Undertaker, who was put out of action by Mark Henry.

"With 'Taker out of the picture for a while, it was easier for me to keep my eyes on the prize," admitted the Smackdown World champion. "But I knew he'd be back. It was just a matter of time."

That time came, appropriately enough, on September 18 at Unforgiven, as The Undertaker returned to action by soundly defeating Mark Henry. On that very same night, the time was also right for Batista, who finally regained the Smackdown World championship by defeating The Great Khali and Rey Mysterio Jr. in a three-way match.

"Now do you see why I'm not celebrating?" queried Batista. "My mission isn't over; it's just beginning. In the past, I've been thrilled just to win the gold. Don't get me wrong, I'm extremely proud of what I've accomplished, but it's just not enough. I have to prove that I'm the best that Smackdown has to offer, and the only way to do that is to put down the one guy who I haven't defeated yet. If I don't beat Undertaker, my title is worthless."

With those words, the World champion slumped a little in his chair, perhaps realizing the enormity of the task that he had laid before himself. As if on cue, the DVD began playing again, showcasing 'Taker's dramatic WrestleMania victory celebration.

Bongggggg...

Batista stared at the screen, nodding his head slightly as if to accept the inevitable challenge.

Bongggggg...

He leaned closer, smiled, and stood up.

Bongggggg...

In one swift motion, he walked to the laptop, reached out, and turned off the DVD.

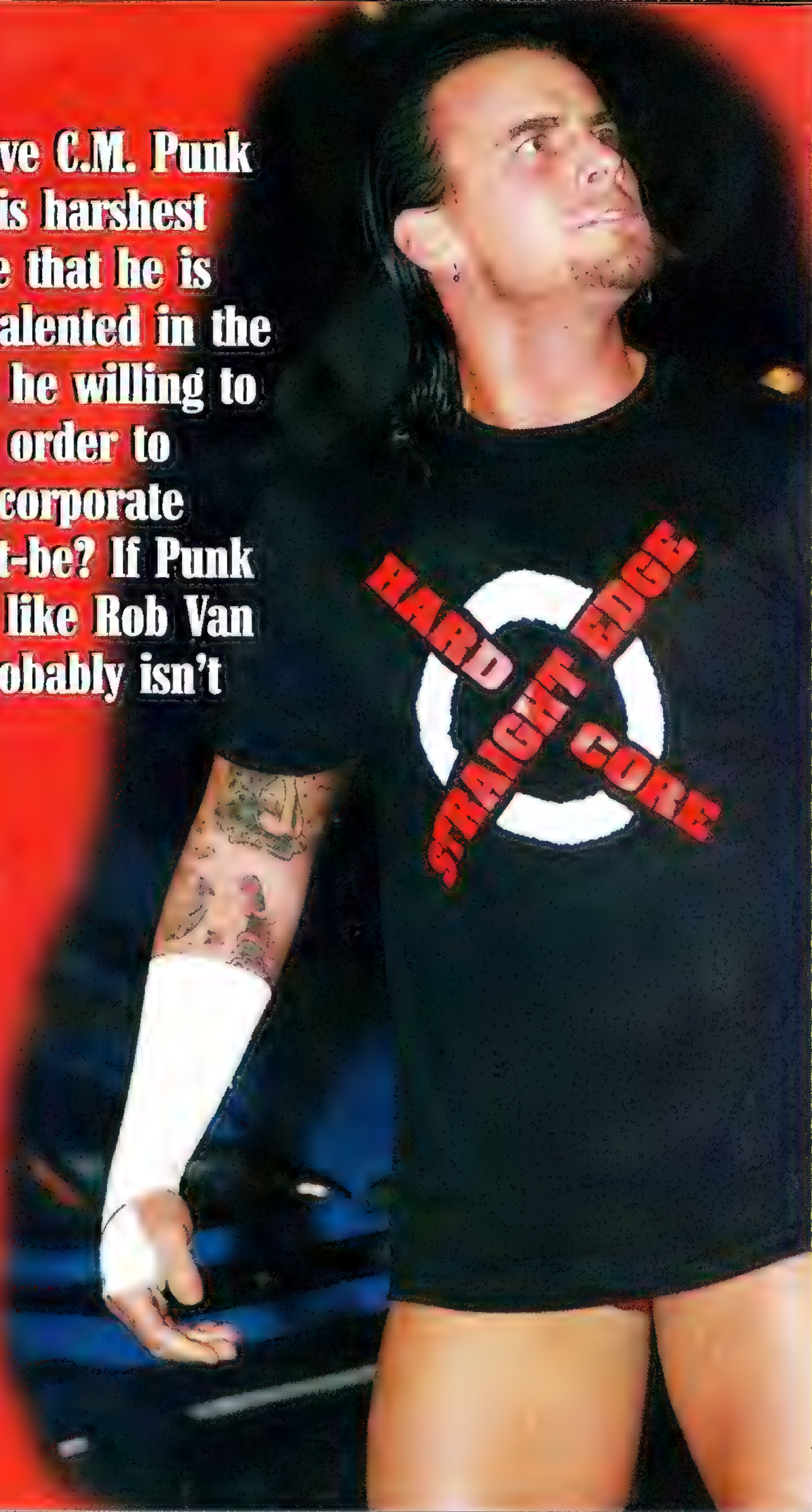
"Bring it on, 'Dead Man,'" he murmured. "Bring it on."

With that, the Smackdown World champion walked off into the night, unafraid of what lay ahead. □



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The fans love C.M. Punk and even his harshest rivals agree that he is extremely talented in the ring, but is he willing to conform in order to please the corporate powers-that-be? If Punk is anything like Rob Van Dam, he probably isn't





PUNK ROCKS!

But How Long Can He
Sing WWE's Tune?

BY BRIAN SOLOMON
PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

HE IS WWE'S breakout star of 2007. He is touted as the savior of the ECW brand, and is the one bona fide main-eventer created there since the bingo hall days. And now, C.M. Punk can also list the ECW championship among his accomplishments. And yet, reports linger of WWE officials slightly worried about their newest runaway sensation. Worried that he won't draw? No. Worried that he won't hold on to the title? No.

DON'T MISS

PWI UPDATE WITH FRANK INGIOSI

EXCLUSIVELY ON:
pwi-online.com

Pro Wrestling Illustrated Senior Writer Frank Ingiosi is insightful, provocative, and downright funny! You've read "The Trade's Mark" in *PWI*. Now check out Frank's column, "The Turn," every Friday afternoon.

Ingiosi on Mark Henry: "We've tried channeling our angst as a way to hopefully motivate Mark. You know, Internet-column tough love and what-not. But, alas, our desires were met with more mediocrity and disappointment. At the very least we hoped Mark would ditch his angry image and just return to the always-lovable 'Sexual Chocolate'-style ways. Sadly, there would be no chocolate for us, sexual or otherwise."

Ingiosi on Jeff Hardy turning 30: "From all of us at "The Turn," happy birthday, Jeff. Keep up the great work. We wanted to get you something, but apparently there isn't a Cameron-area orthopedic surgeon that sells gift certificates."

Ingiosi on "Pacman" Jones in TNA: "Now we're left with a tag team in which one man can wrestle and the other's greatest contribution is taking his shirt off and scurrying around the ring goading his opponents into easily avoided situations. Does it work? No. Is it a draw? Can't imagine that it is. Is it insulting to the fans? Probably to some, yet they still go nuts for Team Pacman each time they enter the Impact Zone."

Frank Ingiosi ...
on pwi-online.com!

7813/10 07

They're worried that they can't control him.

Many of those in power believe C.M. Punk is a little too reminiscent of another maverick who made his name in the "Land Of Extreme," a man who attracted a huge, loyal fan base and then went rogue, walking away at the top of his game because he could no longer exist within WWE's corporate structure: Rob Van Dam.

Any ECW competitor would love to be compared with RVD, but in Punk's case, the comparison may just be his downfall. After all, no matter how successful Van Dam was in the ring and with the fans, it was in the locker room that he suffered his gravest losses. In a perfect world, that shouldn't matter; judgments should be based on performance in the ring. But this isn't a perfect world, and if Punk's not

careful, politics could derail what Elijah Burke, Kevin Thorn, and the rest of The New Breed could not.

Unlike many of WWE's stars who have come up through the developmental system, Punk had already gained significant experience in both Ring of Honor and TNA when he signed with the company. He already had a cult underground following. In a sense, he was able to call his shots a bit more than most new WWE arrivals, and some believe this caused him to be more assertive about his beliefs and attitude.

Although his pre-WWE accomplishments were impressive to some, it tended to create bitterness and pettiness in others. The "too much too soon" mentality sometimes kicks in, and there were many insiders who believed Punk had not yet paid his



Many fans were surprised that C.M. Punk, bearing down on John Morrison with a side chinlock, had such a difficult time with the ECW champion at SummerSlam ... and the Great American Bash ... and at Vengeance. But Punk insisted on following the rules because, deep down, he knew he was the better wrestler.



So many times, Punk had Morrison's shoulders down on the mat, only for the champ to barely escape a pinfall. Punk's title chase ended, of course, when he defeated Morrison at an ECW TV taping.



dues. And, of course, he is very vocal regarding his straight edge philosophy.

For those not in the know, straight edge represents a subculture of hard-

core punk that espouses, well, straight-laced values. Proponents tend to abstain from alcohol, drugs, and casual sex. One can easily understand

why this philosophy isn't very popular among a locker room of macho wrestlers. Punk's catchphrase, "I'm better than you," which solidified his heel status on the indy circuit, takes on new relevance among his peers in WWE. Critics charge that Punk possesses a false sense of moral superiority, which encourages him to speak his mind to his fellow wrestlers and higher authorities.

The upside is that Punk always speaks from his heart and in total honesty. The downside is that he says things that others don't necessarily like to hear.

While Punk may not agree with Van Dam's pro-marijuana stance, he shares a number of basic principles with RVD. Both are known for being honest with their fans, giving frank answers during interviews, and refusing to tow the company line when they disagree. Like Van Dam, Punk has been adamant in maintaining his individuality while other wrestlers conform to corporate and creative whims as much as possible.

It's become obvious that C.M. Punk is at a crossroads. On the one hand, Punk can choose Van Dam's path and stick to his principles no matter what

ROB VAN DAM:

"C.M. PUNK IS A MAN OF INTEGRITY"

Like C.M. Punk, Rob Van Dam knows how hard it is to maintain one's individuality while trying to survive inside a corporate pressure-cooker. Van Dam struck that balance for six years in WWE, delivering five-star matches when it seemed the higher-ups were determined to keep him down. When he finally reached the pinnacle as Raw World and ECW champion last year, a brush with the law put him in WWE's doghouse again.

Many suggest that Van Dam's outspokenness regarding the direction of the ECW brand caused him to lose favor among the corporate sphere, more so than any legal matter.

"When they first brought ECW back, I had a very positive attitude," said Van Dam in an exclusive interview with *THE WRESTLER*. "But when I saw how different it was gonna be from the original ECW, and that it wasn't intended to be anything like it whatsoever, then my attitude became very negative. And it was definitely not good for me, because I didn't want to be there anymore."

Van Dam isn't completely negative about his time in WWE, or even completely negative about the company, but he does sympathize with Punk's current plight. "C.M. Punk stands for something that can't be taken away from him. He prides himself on things that take integrity to stand behind. He doesn't touch any drugs or a drop of

alcohol—that alone makes him stand out. He's a great wrestler, and has hardcore pride. Back when the ECW house shows were falling under, he was as angry as anybody about the opportunity for us to be shown as individuals being taken from us."

Considering RVD's past difficulties, can Punk plug into the new ECW and make a success of it? "I don't exactly know what this new ECW is, so I don't know if him being such a standout guy will be detrimental to WWE's plans. It's possible he won't fit into their pre-set notion of a guy that they're gonna get behind. C.M. Punk is a man of integrity, and that has won him over a lot of fans. And similar to my situation, the fans will demand him and always get behind him and be there for him, regardless of what's going on in the bookers' minds."

—Brian Solomon

the consequences may be. Admittedly, this may not be the wisest move for him career-wise. On the other hand, he can go the Bobby Lashley route.

In many ways, Lashley is the epitome of WWE's corporate ideal. A soft-spoken, athletically gifted competitor who plays by the rules, Lashley has reaped the rewards of walking the line. Granted, he did have that little

"Battle Of The Billionaires" run-in with Mr. McMahon last spring, but it's reasonable to assume that all was forgiven once the preliminary buy rate numbers for WrestleMania 23 started coming in—and there's no evidence that Lashley has caused any trouble for WWE in the corporate sense.

Once Lashley arrived in ECW, it seemed that the purpose of the entire

brand was to get Lashley over with the fans. After that was accomplished, the Colorado powerhouse was rewarded with a draft to Raw, the flagship brand.

Punk has shown he can get the job done in the ring. He's ascended to the heights of ECW, he's captured the imagination of the fans like no one else in recent memory, and his ana-





The "Straight Edge Superstar" uses a devastating flying knee to catch Elijah Burke, who has emerged as a top contender to the ECW title. ECW stars are finding out that Punk always gives 100 percent, whether he is a challenger or champion.

conda vice and go to sleep maneuver are among the sport's most feared finishers. Unfortunately, wrestling stars rise and fall based on a variety of factors, and what you see on television is

only one of them. If he continues his renegade ways, Punk may find that he has risen as high as he can in WWE ... because officials are afraid of allowing him to rise any higher.




Although Punk aligned himself with The ECW Originals against The New Breed, it's likely that Punk wouldn't have been satisfied with being a long-term member of a faction. Punk is too much of an individualist for that.



Punk prepares to drag Matt Striker across the ring with a flying bulldog, an age-old maneuver that he has dusted off and brought back to prominence. In this case, it was the teacher who learned a lesson.

If Punk is anything like Van Dam, he will put his principles first, and he cannot be a "company man" like Lashley. Of course, as RVD's fans can tell you, this is not always the wisest career choice. Yet, if he goes the Lashley route and enjoys the benefits, his diehard fans may consider him a sellout. It's a difficult balance to strike, and it will be interesting to see how long Punk can maintain it.

Punk has proven tenacious in the past, and capable of charting WWE's shark-infested political waters. He survived the ouster of Paul Heyman, which many assumed would spell the end for him. Yet his raw skill and popularity with fans got him through it. Will that be enough to propel him to the next level? It wasn't enough for Van Dam. Clearly, Punk has a decision to make. Punk lives by the virtues of the straight edge culture, but if he's not careful, he may find himself plummeting off that edge and into the abyss of wrestling oblivion. □



The fans demand to see it, but WWE executives don't think it's a wise business move. Do they really believe that John Cena vs. Jeff Hardy wouldn't draw money? Or are they protecting Cena?

JOHN CENA

The Money Match That

BY DAVE ROSENBAUM
PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

AT ONE TIME, Cena vs. Hardy might have been the answer to this question: "Which WWE vs. TNA dream match would you most like to see?" Jeff Hardy was one of the top wrestlers in TNA, but his stay there was not without incident. Suspensions and erratic behavior—including several no-shows—marred Hardy's four-year stay in TNA, but his reckless, devil-may-care approach to wrestling made him one of the most exciting wrestlers in the company.

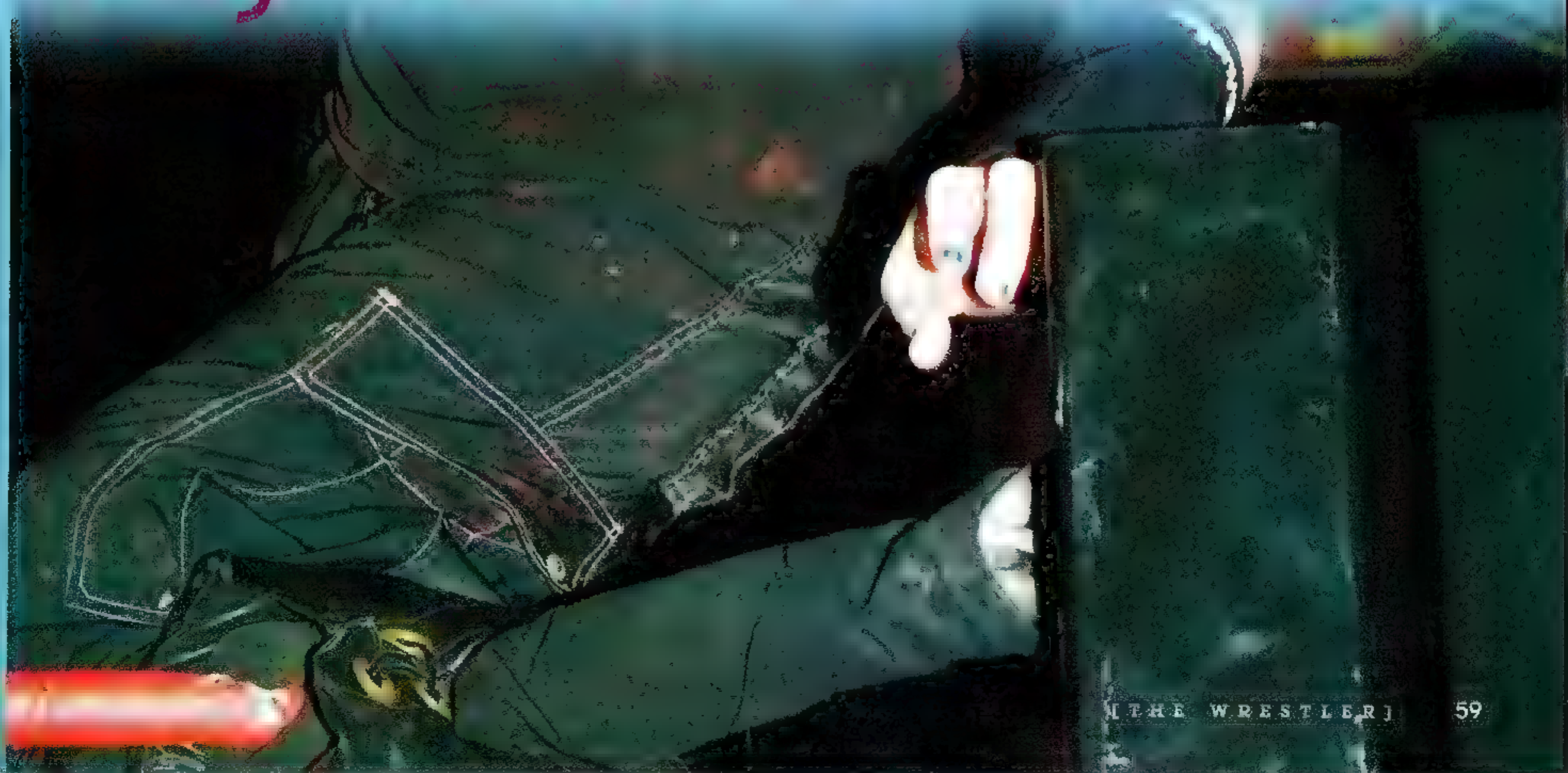
And John Cena? From the day he nearly defeated Kurt Angle in his first televised WWE match in 2002 to the third of his WWE world championships, Cena has been the man to beat in the company.

Mitchell & Ness



JEFF HARDY

May Never Be Made



"If Cena planned to bide his time and look for openings to counter-wrestle Hardy, Cena could find his plan quickly falling to the wayside as Hardy turned up the intensity and pace of the match."

We polled a sampling of *THE WRESTLER* readers to find out what matches they really want to see, and in WWE your overwhelming choice was Cena vs. Hardy. Forget the fact that Cena was stripped of the title this past fall after suffering a torn pectoral muscle. Anyone who knows or has seen Cena knows that he'll be back and better than ever. These are the facts:

In the minds of many people, Cena is the rightful Raw World champion whether he has the belt or not.

At the time of the poll, Hardy was the WWE Intercontinental champion.

And since the glory days of Hulk Hogan vs. Randy Savage, World champion vs. Intercontinental champion is what people have wanted to see. Usually, the powers-that-be have delivered.

"Let's face it," said Carl Jenkins, a Cena fan from Topeka, Kansas, "Cena has dominated WWE for the past three years, and he's beaten everyone. Hardy is finally overcoming his personal demons and has risen to his potential. On top of that, he doesn't see himself as a cruiserweight. He sees himself as a guy who's capable of toppling the big guns, and Cena is *the* big gun. Hardy wants this match to happen, Cena never backs down from a challenge, and WWE has to know that Cena vs. Hardy means box-office gold. I'd pay \$500 for a ticket to that match."

But will the match ever happen? Even though all of the logic points to a Cena vs. Hardy pay-per-view main event before 2008 is over, there are reasons to believe it will never happen.

For one, it's possible that Cena's injury is more serious than he and the company have let on and that even after he recovers and returns to action, the possibility of re-injuring the pectoral muscle is high.

"He suffered a complete tear of his pectoralis major muscle," said Dr. Gary Phillips, a sports medicine expert. "So let's say the initial prognosis is correct and he's out for six months to a year. Missing a year of action isn't even the worst-case scenario. It's not even a certainty that his injury will ever heal 100 percent. Look at how the injury occurred:

John Hardy's popularity did not wane when the star jumped to TNA in 2004. His fans even forgave his no-shows at tapings and welcomed his return to WWE, voting Hardy the most desired man to take on WWE bigwig John Cena.



Size is no obstacle for Hardy, who refuses to be ranked among cruiserweights. He has taken on—and beaten—WWE's top heavyweights (including current Raw World champ Randy Orton, pictured). Cena should be at the top of Hardy's hit list.



Once a body has fallen to a severe injury, that body is often never quite the same. Cena's pectoral tear could make him fluid to face challenging opposition upon his return from rehab, making the high-flying Hardy someone to avoid.

by executing a simple hiptoss, which isn't a high-intensity maneuver. One has to wonder, from a medical standpoint, whether Cena's body is breaking down. It's like suffering a broken hand from shaking a strong person's hand.

"The John Cena we've seen for years could be a person of the past."

If that's the case, then the Cena who defeated a long list of top stars, big and small, including Kurt Angle, Shawn Michaels, Triple-H, Umaga, The Great Khali, and Randy Orton—wrestlers of every possible style and size—could be

gone, forcing Cena to choose the type of opponent he is most comfortable against.

But let's assume Cena is healthy and was up for the challenge. In Hardy, he'd be facing a fearless daredevil who loves speeding up the pace of a match and taking chances. If Cena planned to bide his time and look for openings to counter-wrestle Hardy, Cena could find his plan quickly falling to the wayside as Hardy turned up the intensity and pace of the match. It is one thing for a man to enter the ring knowing he's going to face a scientific wrestler. It is one

WILL OUR OTHER DREAM MATCHES COME TRUE?



A dream battle of Samoans

In addition to "What dream match would you like to see in WWE?" we also asked our sampling of readers "What dream match would you like to see in TNA?" and "What WWE vs. TNA dream match would you like to see?" As in the case of the WWE dream match, readers most want to see (Jeff Hardy vs. John Cena), readers were clear in their opinions, and a majority decision was reached.

In TNA, readers would like to see World champion Kurt Angle vs. former X division champion A.J. Styles.

As for the WWE vs. TNA dream match, readers would like to see 348-pound former WWE Intercontinental champion Umaga vs. former TNA X division champion Samoa Joe.

The Angle vs. Styles match is

intriguing. Styles is considered by many, pound-for-pound, the best wrestler in the world, and his mix of high-flying and high-impact moves would be effective against Angle's high-impact, ground-based attack. This battle of high-flyer vs. scientific wrestler has always fascinated wrestling fans, and a match between Angle and Styles could be reminiscent of Angle's classic matches against Shawn Michaels in WWE.

But will it happen? Probably not in the near future. Neither wrestler is a fan favorite, and unless one turns soon, TNA is not going to put two wrestlers in the ring that very few of the fans want to support. However, Styles has the most to gain by a turn to fan favorite, so it's possible that he'll eventually see dollar signs in the fans' cheers. Don't count on that

happening with Angle, who has taken on much bigger stars than Styles and may not see how such a match would improve his cache as champion.

Umaga vs. Samoa Joe would be a titanic battle of Samoan brawlers. A match between them would be in the interest of both WWE and TNA. Many people believe that WWE is pushing Umaga very hard because it wants its Samoan wrestler to be viewed as superior to TNA's Samoa Joe. But let's face it: The only chance of seeing this showdown is Joe defecting to WWE or Umaga going to TNA and that's likely to happen soon.

So, Samoa Joe vs. Umaga? Maybe someday.

Angle vs. Styles? Not yet.

But keep hoping.

—Dave Rosenbaum



Cena's Raw World title reign was one of the most impressive in recent history (left). He has beaten all comers except for the man who would provide the biggest dream match for fans today: Intercontinental champ Jeff Hardy (right). Some of the most classic bouts of this generation have pitted World champs against I-C champs, but this match is one that will likely remain a dream.

thing for a man to enter the ring knowing he's going to face a brawler. But what do you do against Hardy, who's impossible to plan for?

The best move may be to avoid him altogether. And if that's what Cena intends to do, WWE will probably help him.

"It is in WWE's best interests for Cena to remain a top star who seems unbeatable," a WWE insider told us. "His reputation—his aura—is invaluable to WWE, which has made millions of dollars off of him. WWE would be perfectly happy to let Cena pick his spots when he returns. And a match against Hardy would be a bad spot for him."

Then there's the issue of the WWE mindset. The corporate hierarchy—specifically Vince McMahon—does not see money in Hardy. That would be a mistaken assumption on his part. Hardy hears just as many high-pitched squeals from female fans and kids as Cena, but unlike Cena, Hardy has earned the re-

spect of longtime male fans by delivering a decade's worth of daredevil matches without the benefit of the WWE hype machine. Those male fans respect Hardy in the same way they once respected Chris Benoit and Eddie Guerrero. They would pay to see Hardy embarrass Cena.

But, again, Hardy doesn't fit the main-event prototype. He is not larger than life, with muscles rippling and an overbearing persona. He's a workhorse, able to elevate mid-carders into main-eventers, yet rarely given a chance to shine among the top tier.

It is also possible that McMahon is quite aware of Hardy's strengths. Hardy would expose Cena's weaknesses, causing the adult male fan base to rebel against Cena big time. There is also WWE's age-old reluctance to pit fan favorites against each other, going back to the Bob Backlund-Jimmy Snuka days. McMahon still has that mentality, no doubt believing that Hardy can only diminish Cena's star-power.

So scream for a Hardy vs. Cena showdown, Jeff Hardy fans. Argue that it's your dream match, the one you want to see. And know that while it should happen, it probably won't. □

"There is also WWE's age-old reluctance to pit fan favorites against each other, going back to the Bob Backlund-Jimmy Snuka days. McMahon still has that mentality, no doubt believing that Hardy can only diminish Cena's star-power."

THE WRESTLING ANALYST

STING



Years Pro: 22

Size: 6'3", 255

"PWI 500" Listings: 2006—26

2005—Not listed

2004—Not listed

2003—Not listed

2002—Not listed

2001—Not listed

2000—26

1999—12

1998—12

1997—Not listed

1996—3

1995—3

1994—8

1993—4

1992—1

1991—1

Titles: WCW World (6 times)

WCW World tag team (3 times)

WCW International

NWA World

NWA U.S. (2 times)

NWA TV

UWF tag team

PWI Awards: Comeback of the Year: Winner (2006)

1st runner-up (1998)

Feud of the Year: 2nd runner-up (2006)

Inspirational Wrestler: Winner (1990)

Match of the Year: Winner (1991)

1st runner-up (1988)

1st runner-up (1990)

Most Improved Wrestler: Winner (1988)

Most Popular Wrestler: Winner (1991,

1992, 1994, 1997)

1st runner-up (1990, 1993, 1995)

2nd runner-up (1988, 1989)

3rd runner-up (2006)

Rookie of the Year: 2nd runner-up (1986)

Wrestler of the Year: Winner (1990)

1st runner-up (1999)

2nd runner-up (1995)

THE NUMBERS

Offense (8.5): The "Stinger" has lost a step or two when it comes to offense; however, he never fails to surprise when things seem their bleakest. His size and power is only made more impressive by his sporadic streaks of unbridled intensity. Sure, he may not be the spike-haired surfer of old, but today's Sting is just as dangerous.

Defense (9.0): Sting is the modern-day master of the "rope-a-dope" style of offensive defense. As brilliant a ring technician as there is in the sport today, Sting is willing to take a punch in order to set up his opponent for two. His corner reversals are as crisp as ever, as he allows opponents to believe they have the upper hand before hammering them with an array of uppercuts.

Experience (10.0): With a career spanning three decades, Sting is as highly decorated a wrestling legend as some of the all-time greats in the sport's storied history. He has been "the man" at every level of competition, winning championship gold at nearly every stop along the way. His resurgence in TNA is as much a tribute to skill as his enduring legend and ring acumen.

Conditioning (9.0): The man who confidently walked the aisle on his way to a third NWA World title with a victory over Jeff Jarrett at Bound for Glory 2006 did not resemble a typical 47-year-old wrestler at the end of the line. Sting has been meticulous in his approach to ring conditioning since returning to TNA in early-2006 and the hard work shows in his late-match stamina.

Science (8.0): Today's Sting is far more likely to try to beat his opponent with a finishing move in the early going than he was 10 years ago. Gone are the gradual wear-down holds and lower body work-overs to set up a scorpion deathlock. Whereas in the past, a high-impact move such as the Stinger splash was a complement to an impressive arsenal, power and strength moves now make up the main course.

Stamina (9.0): What more can be said about a man whose intensity in the ring and general athleticism rivals those of competitors some 20 years his junior? Sting has mastered the ability to pace himself in the ring. He can outlast just about any competitor and that comes from not only a depth of experience, but also conditioning.

Power (9.0): When the speed is still there, power can act as a complement. Still, it seems as if Sting is relying more on raw power than a more balanced ground attack. The thing is, it's working like a charm. The test of a true ring general is the ability to adapt his game to whatever works best, given the competition. Amid the quick, elusive talent on the TNA roster, a power wrestler with Sting's ability is a rarity.

Speed (8.0): The wheels aren't exactly what they used to be, but that doesn't mean Sting's quickness is a detriment. It's vitally important to point out that—at his best—Sting was one of the quickest wrestlers in the sport. Today, he's still impressive, but, compared to the very high bar he set for himself early in his career, it's obvious that he's focused on other areas of his skill set.

Ability To Absorb Punishment (9.0): The man can take a punch and, frighteningly, it seems to make him only angrier. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Sting thrives off of his opponents' flurries of offense. His trademark yell and flex after a particularly ferocious attack by his opponent remains a testament to his toughness in the ring.

Quality Of Opposition (9.5): Sting has done something that few in his position would ever consider at this stage in his career: He's branched out. From old foe Jeff Jarrett to the gargantuan Abyss to the brilliantly sinister Christopher Daniels, Sting has faced a wide array of talent since entering TNA. Instead of holding out for main-event spots, Sting has sampled the best talent that TNA has to offer and stood up to all tests.



① After more than 20 years in the sport, Sting hasn't lost any of his intensity. Even a powerful blow by an opponent doesn't necessarily faze Sting. He simply lets out a scream to help pump the adrenaline, flexes up, and responds with an offensive maneuver of his own.



- ③ Sting goes high with an impressive flying elbowsmash as Christian Cage braces for impact. Sting's experience, combined with the stamina to go all out in every match, makes him one of TNA's most dangerous competitors.



- ② Age is just a number to Sting, who has accepted challenges from veterans such as Jeff Jarrett, in addition to behemoths like Abyss and strategists like Christopher Daniels. In most cases, Sting has emerged triumphant.



- ④ When Jarrett began harassing the Borden family, Sting foolishly took the bait and ended up receiving a gang beating from Jarrett and his goons. Too often, Sting lets his emotions get the better of him.

- ⑤ Sting's bleeding heart has gotten him involved in other people's fights. Trying to reach out to "The Man-Monster" Abyss got Sting into a bit of trouble, but he said he'd do the same thing all over again.

THE ANALYSIS

Repertoire: The staples are still there, but the delivery has changed. Fans will see the occasional scorpion deathdrop when it seems appropriate, a Stinger splash is all but certain at some point during a match, and, for special occasions, he'll make opponents tap with the scorpion deathlock. But the real change comes from the fact that TNA's painted hero is now more of a power grappler than a strategic wrestler. The skill is still there, but Sting has realized that he is better suited for a strength-based attack in today's sport than trying to match TNA's younger talent move for move.

Strengths: Being a ring legend with the ability and stamina of a rookie makes Sting very unique. He truly appreciates each moment he still has in the ring, and that love of the sport shows in his wrestling. His vast knowledge of the industry and the fact that he came up through the ranks with many of those wrestlers who have greatly influenced his current competition puts "The Stinger" at a huge advantage. His skill, knowledge, and ability to anticipate his opponents' approaches are his greatest strengths.

Weaknesses: Sting has revealed his vulnerabilities since returning to TNA and a crafty opponent will always use those to his advantage. The man just

cares too much. When Jeff Jarrett harassed Sting's family, the icon played right into the "King Of The Mountain's" trap and received a beat-down on more than one occasion. When Sting then tried to reach out and free Abyss from his deranged association with James Mitchell, he was rewarded with a solid thrashing at the hands of "The Man-Monster."

Defining Career Moment: Following his return to wrestling, Sting cemented an already impressive legacy by capturing the NWA World championship by defeating Jeff Jarrett at Bound for Glory in October 2006—16 years after his first NWA title victory, against longtime nemesis Ric Flair at the 1990 Great American Bash! While that first title reign began the long road of success for "The Stinger," the victory over Jarrett brought his career full-circle and went a long way in defining his imprint on the history of the sport.

Future: Sting has been wise to keep plans of his in-ring future quiet. Initially, his stint with TNA was supposed to last only a year and, now, well into his second year with the company, Sting is as resilient and popular as ever. Until Sting decides the time is right for retirement, fans will continue to appreciate his effort and relish the fact that they are witnessing a true legend in action. □



- ⑥ Purists will always debate whether Sting's scorpion deathlock was more effective than Bret Hart's sharpshooter. A.J. Styles probably doesn't have the definitive answer either, but he would no doubt testify that the scorpion deathlock is one painful hold.



OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

- 1 **KURT ANGLE**
233, Pittsburgh, PA
(2) TNA World champion
- 2 **RANDY ORTON**
245, St. Louis, MO
(8) Raw World champion
- 3 **C.M. PUNK**
210, Chicago, IL
(-) ECW champion
- 4 **BATISTA**
318, Washington, DC
(9) Smackdown World champion
- 5 **NIGEL McGUINNESS**
220, London, England
(-) Ring of Honor champion
- 6 **MITSU HARU MISAWA**
228, Ashikaga, Japan
(6) GHC heavyweight champion
- 7 **TRIPLE-H**
269, Greenwich, CT
(-) No. 1 contender: Raw World title
- 8 **STING**
255, Venice Beach, CA
(-) No. 1 contender: TNA World title
- 9 **TAKESHI MORISHIMA**
297, Tokyo, Japan
(5) No. 1 contender: Ring of Honor title
- 10 **HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
227, Ogaki, Japan
(-) IWGP heavyweight champion



Randy Orton

TAG TEAMS

- 1 **LANCE CADE & TREVOR MURDOCH**
Combined weight: 522 pounds
(2) Raw World tag team champions
- 2 **MATT HARDY & MVP**
Combined weight: 465 pounds
(-) Smackdown World tag team champions
- 3 **PAUL LONDON & BRIAN KENDRICK**
Combined weight: 380 pounds
(3) No. 1 contenders: Raw World tag team title
- 4 **A.J. STYLES & TRAVIS TOMKO**
Combined weight: 494 pounds
(-) TNA World tag team champions
- 5 **JAY & MARK BRISCOE**
Combined weight: 385 pounds
(5) Ring of Honor tag team champions
- 6 **RORY & ROBBIE McALLISTER**
Combined weight: 475 pounds
(-) No. 2 contenders: Raw World tag team title
- 7 **HOMICIDE & HERNANDEZ**
Combined weight: 495 pounds
(9) No. 1 contenders: TNA World tag team title
- 8 **JESSE & FESTUS DALTON**
Combined weight: 545 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: SD World tag team title
- 9 **GIANT BERNARD & TRAVIS TOMKO**
Combined weight: 645 pounds
(10) IWGP International tag team champions
- 10 **THE UNDERTAKER & KANE**
Combined weight: 630 pounds
(-) No. 2 contenders: SD World tag team title

WWE RAW

World Champion:
RANDY ORTON

(1) 245, St. Louis, MO

- 1—**TRIPLE-H**
(-) 269, Greenwich, CT
- 2—**JEFF HARDY**
(-) 212, Cameron, NC
- 3—**SANTINO MARELLA**
(4) 255, Calabria, Italy
- 4—**CARLITO**
(3) 220, San Juan, Puerto Rico
- 5—**KEN KENNEDY**
(5) 246, Green Bay, WI
- 6—**SNITSKY**
(7) 310, Nesquehoning, PA
- 7—**SHAWN MICHAELS**
(-) 217, San Antonio, TX
- 8—**HARDCORE HOLLY**
(-) 235, Mobile, AL
- 9—**CODY RHODES**
(9) 232, Charlotte, NC
- 10—**UMAGA**
(2) 348, Samoa

WWE SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
BATISTA

(1) 318, Washington, DC

- 1—**MVP**
(2) 252, Miami, FL
- 2—**REY MYSTERIO JR.**
(-) 168, San Diego, CA
- 3—**KANE**
(4) 326, St. Louis, MO
- 4—**THE GREAT KHALI**
(C) 408, Bombay, India
- 5—**MATT HARDY**
(3) 213, Cameron, NC
- 6—**FINLAY**
(5) 230, Belfast, Ireland
- 7—**THE UNDERTAKER**
(-) 304, Dallas, TX
- 8—**CHRIS MASTERS**
(8) 270, Santa Monica, CA
- 9—**CHUCK PALUMBO**
(-) 256, West Warwick, RI
- 10—**KENNY DYKSTRA**
(-) 234, Worcester, MA

ECW

Champion:
C.M. PUNK

(1) 210, Chicago, IL

- 1—**BIG DADDY V**
(9) 496, Memphis, TN
- 2—**ELIJAH BURKE**
(5) 230, Jacksonville, FL
- 3—**THE BOOGEYMAN**
(2) 255, parts unknown
- 4—**KEVIN THORN**
(6) 270, Memphis, TN
- 5—**STEVIE RICHARDS**
(4) 225, Philadelphia, PA
- 6—**TOMMY DREAMER**
(10) 265, Yonkers, NY
- 7—**JOHN MORRISON**
(C) 204, Hanover, WV
- 8—**THE MIZ**
(8) 210, Parma, OH
- 9—**MAHONEY**
(-) 361, Nutley, NJ
- 10—**MATT STRIKER**
(7) 215, Bayside, NY

TNA

World Champion:
KURT ANGLE

(C) 233, Pittsburgh, PA

- 1—**STING**
(4) 255, Venice Beach, CA
- 2—**SAMOA JOE**
(2) 270, Samoa
- 3—**CHRISTIAN CAGE**
(3) 225, Toronto, Ontario
- 4—**JAY LETHAL**
(5) 192, Elizabeth, NJ
- 5—**CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
(6) 210, Los Angeles, CA
- 6—**ERIC YOUNG**
(-) 218, Vancouver, BC
- 7—**JAMES STORM**
(8) 229, Franklin, TN
- 8—**SENSHI**
(9) 170, Brooklyn, NY
- 9—**ABYSS**
(1) 295, parts unknown
- 10—**RHINO**
(10) 275, Detroit, MI

Top 10 and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (—) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED OCTOBER 18, 2007

ACCLAIMED WRESTLING ENTITY: Champion—Scott Fowler; 1—Patrick Brink; 2—Ruckus; 3—C.A. Elliott; 4—Bobby Dempsey; 5—Rhett Titus; 6—T.J. Cannon; 7—Bruce Maxwell; 8—Bobby Shields; 9—Shane Shadows; 10—Zachary Shane.

ATLANTIC CHAMPIONSHIP PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Hangtime; 1—The Stro; 2—K.C. McKnight; 3—Daniel Messina; 4—Aaron Devil; 5—Brandon Maretti; 6—Stan Bradock; 7—D.Z. Hyde; 8—Cletus Bass; 9—Soul Reaper; 10—Dave Renegade.

AWA SUPREME CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Billy Maverick; 1—Damien Divine; 2—Apollo; 3—Chris Blayze; 4—Eric Draven; 5—Karma; 6—Mike Trusty; 7—Nic Noble; 8—Robert Royale; 9—Tommie Foreman; 10—William Valentine.

CHAMPIONSHIP PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Jake Davis; 1—Leslie Leatherman; 2—Bob Keller; 3—Griffen; 4—Bill Bain; 5—Hyjinx; 6—Deuce Donatelli; 7—Keemo the Samoan; 8—The Barbarian; 9—Jimmy Jessup; 10—Bobby Shields.

MID-SOUTH PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Vacant; 1—The Atomic Dogg; 2—Prince Al Farat; 3—Krushar Kanine; 4—Gary Gram; 5—Jeff Jett; 6—Eric Rose; 7—Matt Riviera; 8—Shane Rawls; 9—Frankie Valentine; 10—Mark Johnson.

MID-STATES WRESTLING: Champion—Jason Jones; 1—Jack Dalton; 2—Michael Barry; 3—Stephen E; 4—Kevin Lovejones; 5—Gary Gram; 6—Jake Boulder; 7—Jim Fallon; 8—Bubba Hall; 9—Kenny Campbell; 10—Kraig Keesaman.

NATIONAL WRESTLING LEAGUE: Champion—Samu; 1—John Rambo; 2—Chris Cline; 3—Blackhawk; 4—Professor Egon Ecton; 5—Rocky Dicola; 6—Doink the Clown; 7—Todd Hill; 8—Leslie Leatherman; 9—Griffen; 10—Brandon Scott.

PRIMAL CONFLICT WRESTLING: Champion—Jimmy Janetty; 1—Julio Dinero; 2—Scott Fowler; 3—Brock Singleton; 4—Tommy Hawk; 5—Bobby Shields; 6—Bill Bain; 7—Scotty McKeever; 8—Kermon the German; 9—The Barbarian; 10—Zachary Shane.

NORTHEAST WRESTLING: Champion—Xavier; 1—Kurt Angle; 2—Christian Cage; 3—A.J. Styles; 4—Samoa Joe; 5—Jerry Lawler; 6—Sid Vicious; 7—Kamala; 8—Abyss; 9—Romeo Roselli; 10—Joey Matthews.

SOUTHERN INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Vacant; 1—Billy Maverick; 2—Vic the Bruiser; 3—Steve Marino; 4—Indian Outlaw; 5—Robbie Race; 6—Tiny Tim; 7—J.D. Thunder; 8—Cuban Assassin; 9—Chet Robbins; 10—Travis Sawyer.

TEXAS ALL-STAR WRESTLING: Champion—ZenZen; 1—Scoby Gober; 2—T-Bone; 3—Mr. Mayhem; 4—Chip Dumas; 5—Nick Daniels; 6—Panther; 7—Nate Slater; 8—Rocco Carmanooch; 9—Alex Evans; 10—Bones.

WORLD CLASS EXTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Corey Edsel; 1—Hangtime; 2—Tommy Vandal; 3—Tracy Gilbert; 4—Aaron Devil; 5—Johnny Vandal; 6—Dick Foley; 7—Jon Davis; 8—Tyron Knox; 9—Keith Blonde; 10—Shaq Knox.

RING OF HONOR

Champion:

NIGEL McGUINNESS
(6) 220, London, England

1—TAKESHI MORISHIMA
(C) 297, Tokyo, Japan

2—DELIRIOUS
(1) 192, parts unknown

3—BRENT ALBRIGHT
(2) 230, Bayside, CA

4—RODERICK STRONG
(3) 205, Tampa, FL

5—AUSTIN ARIES
(—) 202, Milwaukee, WI

6—JACK EVANS
(4) 165, Parkland, WA

7—B.J. WHITMER
(—) 230, Owensboro, KY

8—CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(5) 238, Schaffhausen, Switz.

9—ERICK STEVENS
(—) 231, Sarasota, FL

10—BRYAN DANIELSON
(8) 185, Aberdeen, WA

OVW

Champion:

MIKE KRUDEL
(C) 210, New York, NY

1—VLADIMIR KOZLOV
(1) 310, Moscow, Russia

2—PAUL BIRCHALL
(2) 281, Surrey, England

3—MANBEAST
(—) 220, Louisville, KY

4—SHAWN SPEARS
(3) 235, Louisville, KY

5—COLT CABANA
(4) 235, Chicago, IL

6—JACOB DUNCAN
(10) 335, Louisville, KY

7—ANTONI POLASKI
(—) 302, Lancaster, PA

8—CHET THE JET
(7) 230, Buffalo, NY

9—STEVE LEWINGTON
(8) 225, Wokingham, England

10—ATLAS DaBONE
(—) 230, Louisville, KY

JAPAN

1—MITSU HARU MISAWA

(1) 228, Ashikaga, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

2—HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(—) 227, Ogaki, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion

3—KENSUKE SASAKI
(3) 251, Tokyo, Japan
All Japan Triple Crown champion

4—YUJI NAGATA
(4) 228, Tokyo, Japan

5—MINORU SUZUKI
(2) 220, Yokohama, Japan

6—MILANO COLLECTION A.T.
(—) 203, Morioka-shi, Japan

7—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI
(—) 211, Saitama, Japan

8—KATSUHIKO NAKAJIMA
(—) 180, Fukuoka, Japan

9—CIMA
(5) 176, Sakai City, Japan
Open the Dream Gate champion

10—TIGER MASK IV
(10) 170, Uryasu, Japan

MEXICO

1—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(5) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

2—PERRO AGUAYO JR.
(6) 200, Zacatecas, Mexico

3—DR. WAGNER JR.
(8) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

4—CIBERNETICO
(4) 175, Mexico City, Mexico

5—EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(3) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico

6—ATLANTIS
(10) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico

7—LIZMARK JR.
(—) 262, Acapulco, Mexico

8—BLUE PANTHER
(—) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

9—L.A. PARK
(9) 235, Torreon, Mexico

10—MR. AGUILA
(2) 185, Tijuana, Mexico



REMEMBER HIM?

A long-lost cousin of Dusty Rhodes he is not, but this suede-vested cowboy once shared a last name with the "American Dream." Trevor Rhodes trained at the Harley Race Wrestling Academy before he debuted in WWE, where he began teaming with Lance Cade. Rhodes now borrows a name from Dusty's former Outlaws partner, Dick Murdoch, and is known as redneck trucker-type and current Raw World tag team champion Trevor Murdoch.

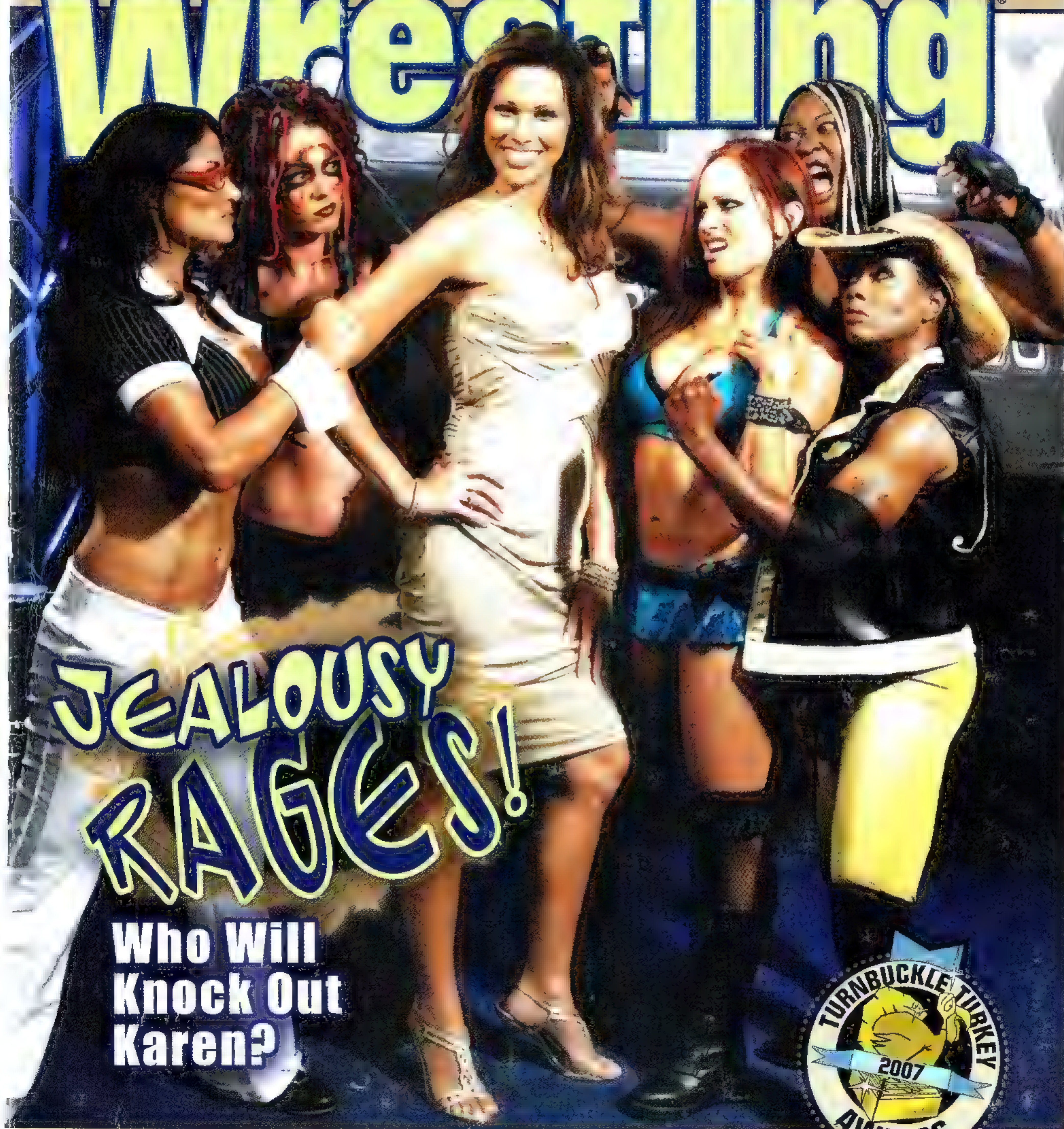
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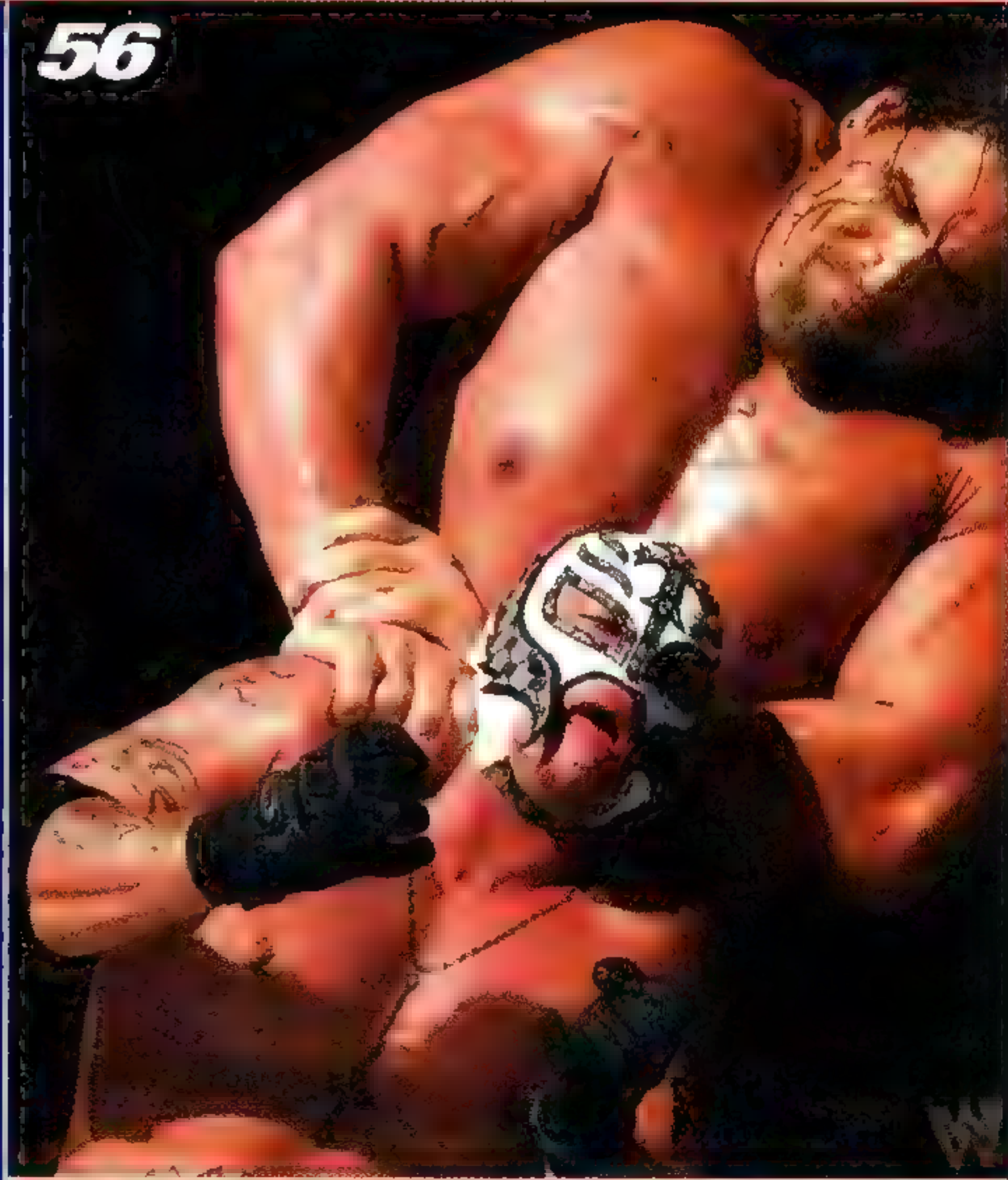
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Gail Kim, Jackie Moore, Christy Hemme, and several other TNA Knockouts have been putting time in the gym, logging miles on the road, and taking their bumps for years now. It's no wonder why they don't like Karen Angle's rapid rise in TNA
- 56 HOTSEAT: REY MYSTERIO JR.**
"I'm as dangerous as anyone in WWE"

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Lee South/TNA Wrestling

COVER DESIGN:
Sherry Stravino

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HEARTBREAK HEALED

What an infusion of electricity Shawn Michaels' return to Raw was at a time when the company so desperately needed a championship-caliber star to lead the brand. With John Cena's terribly unfortunate injury coming at a time where Raw seemed to be getting a

little stale, WWE seemed like it was in real trouble. Even I, a huge wrestling fan, didn't know how interested I would be in Raw without Cena, who happens to be my favorite wrestler of all-time. HBK filled that void and made me realize why I'm still a fan and why I should know better than to second-guess WWE. With Shawn back, we fans can be treated to great feuds such as HBK vs. Randy Orton or, hopefully, another DX reunion, which would be great!

Silly me for thinking that Raw would be headed for the dark ages of wrestling when Cena went down. Now, with all the pieces falling into place, the long wait for Cena to come back won't be as bad.

WINSTON JORDAN
Salem, OR

PURE HEAVYWEIGHT

The unthinkable has happened. The monstrosity, Morishima, has finally been toppled. When Takashi Morishima first took the ROH title in February from Homicide, I was sure he would lose it quickly or immediately to Danielson upon his return. But, surprisingly, Morishima held on to the championship and made a name for himself on the American independent scene at the expense of names like B.J. Whitmer, Samoa Joe, Roderick Strong, Jimmy Rave, Claudio Castagnoli, and even the great American Dragon!

But in October in New Jersey, Nigel McGuinness turned out to be the one man who could take down the Japanese giant and claim the ROH belt. I have followed McGuinness' Ring of Honor career since 2003, and I always knew he



Photo by Joe Zanolle

One great title reign has ended, but a new one begins. Nigel McGuinness became the man that dethroned the giant Morishima for the Ring of Honor heavyweight championship, something reader Alain Schultz never thought would happen.

was the caliber of a heavyweight champion, but I assumed he would forever be known as a Pure champion due to his record reign in the company. With his win, McGuinness showed the rest of the ROH roster that he is a true competitor to be reckoned with.

ALAIN SCHULTZ
Longview, WA

STRANGER THAN FICTION

Reading Senior Writer Frank Ingiosi's response to the Benoit family tragedy ("The Benoit Tragedy: The Wrestling World Reacts," *INSIDE WRESTLING*, Volume 18, 2007) was like reading about my own reaction. I also suspected Vince McMahon was behind the report of the murder-suicide. I'm a bit embarrassed to admit that it took me until the next morning to realize it was the truth and not a WWE-fabricated storyline. As disgusted as I was at the thought of the story as a McMahon angle, I was even more disgusted that the whole ordeal had actually happened. I found myself wishing it were simply a storyline. Chris Benoit was the last person I ever thought I would ever despise more than Vince McMahon, but, sadly, I agreed with Vince when he called Benoit a "monster" on the *Today* show. Anyone who would do such a thing would have to be.

AL NARDIN
Herndon, VA

T&A KNOCKOUTS

I really wish that I could come up with some other justification for a women's division in TNA other than the fact that I believe it's solely for the exploitation of women to benefit the promotion's television ratings. While my opinion may not be the popular one with my fellow fans, there's a lot of validity to my claims.

First, there are not many females on the TNA roster to begin with and,

secondly, of the females there, how many of them truly could amount to solid competitors in the ring? With the exception of Gail Kim and Jackie Moore, there really aren't many women with the type of ring experience that would make a women's division worthwhile.

TNA has always seemed to take the high road when it comes to using easy gimmicks to boost its appeal, which is what makes this division most disappointing in my eyes. Here's to hoping I'm wrong, although I don't feel that's the case.

RUTH ADEINE
Bear, DE

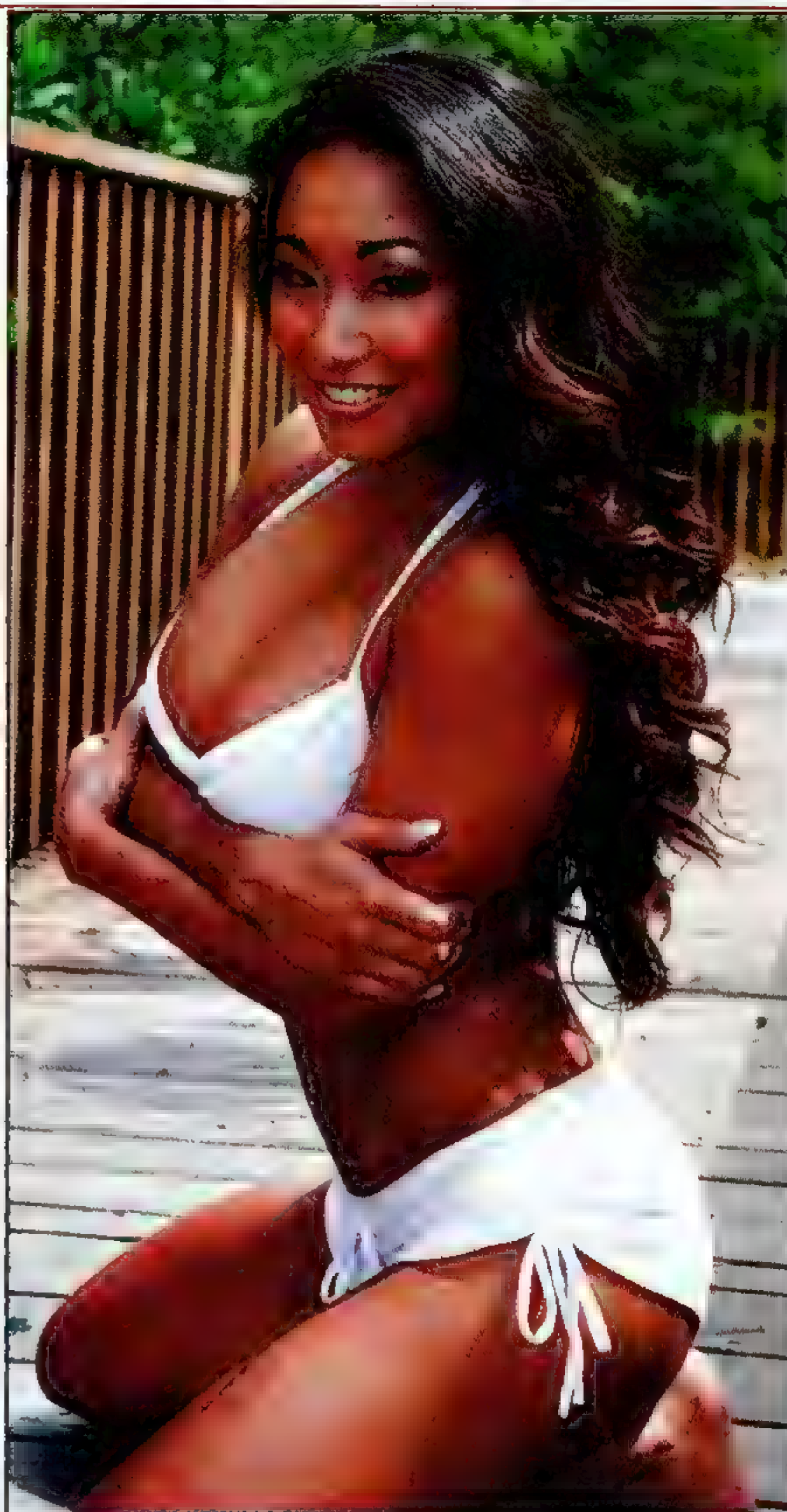
A NEW ERA

Randy Orton. The name itself is aligned with greatness and the man continues to be at the top of his game. Although defeating John Cena would have been a true delight for the whole Orton family, it was a thrill to finally see Randy get back to the top. The distinction of being champion, for Randy, has been long overdue, and I think that any wrestling fan has to give this star his due credit and respect.

How can you not enjoy this wrestler? "The Legend Killer" will

become a much better champion than Cena will ever be simply because he wants it more. I predict Randy will become the Raw World champion that fans can appreciate and follow. If you don't believe me, just take a look at Raw every Monday night and you will see it all unfold.

JOSEPH MITCHELL
Erie, PA □



Was the TNA women's division created to support women's wrestling legitimately or to exploit the physical appeal of talented wrestlers such as Gail Kim? While reader Ruth Adeine respects the newly crowned champion's skills, she is skeptical of the promotion's intentions.

Photo by Lee Sout/TNA Wrestling

By Harry Burkett

TO THE FANS' chagrin, **Kurt Angle** is now a two-time TNA World heavyweight champion. **Sting** defeated Angle for the title on October 14 at Bound for Glory in Atlanta, which held special significance for both men. "The Stinger" was a perennial favorite in the Atlanta-based WCW for over a decade. Angle won an Olympic gold medal in Atlanta in 1996.

Though Angle was cheered on by the Atlanta fans 11 years ago, that was not the case on this night in the Gwinnett Center Arena. When Angle began working on Sting's left arm and wrist at the outset, fans got the feeling that a potentially great wrestling match was developing. They were right. The match had plenty of scientific grappling, as Sting and Angle dazzled each other with quick exchanges, go-behind switches, and other hold reversals. It had plenty of violence, as Sting turned up the intensity by bashing Angle's head into the security railing and the announcers' table. And it had plenty of teases, as Sting escaped a pinfall after enduring three German suplexes, and "The Stinger" rolled out of an anklelock and applied the scorpion deathlock.

Unfortunately, this match also had the usual TNA mix of interfering women, kayoed referees, and weird controversy. **Karen Angle** ran into the ring, causing Sting to release the scorpion deathlock. As referee **Rudy Charles** escorted Karen to the back, **Kevin Nash** entered the ring and clotheslined Sting. Just as Sting was about to mount a comeback, Angle knocked out the referee. Sting executed the scorpion deathdrop, but there was no referee to make the count. Referee **Andrew Thomas** ran into the ring, but Nash knocked him out and helped Angle double-team Sting. Incredibly, Sting double-clotheslined both men, grabbed his bat from Angle, used it on both men, and planted Angle with a scorpion deathdrop as Charles, the original referee, regained his senses and scored the three-count.

According to some fans in attendance, the Sting-Angle bout was a potential Match of the Year candidate despite the inordinate amount of outside interference. Overall, Bound for Glory garnered good reviews and Sting-Angle simply capped off an exciting evening.

But TNA squandered much of this goodwill just two nights later. That's because Angle regained the TNA World championship from Sting at the *Impact* tapings in Orlando. Kevin Nash was a factor once again in this match, as he got on the ring apron and distracted referee Thomas. The referee was knocked off the apron when Sting and Angle hit the ropes, and the distraction allowed Angle to execute the Olympic slam on Sting. Veteran referee **Earl Hebner** hit the ring, made the three-count, and declared Angle the new champion. Thomas questioned Hebner's call, prompting an argument between the two refs.

As a result, TNA Managing Director Jim Cornette announced that World champ Angle and Nash would team to face Sting and a mystery partner at Genesis—and the man who scores the fall would win the title. **Vince Russo** must be in full control these days.

More big news to come out of Bound for Glory is TNA's crowning of a women's champion. **Gail Kim** emerged victorious in a 10-woman gauntlet match that involved familiar TNA gals **Christy Hemme**, **Ms. Brooks**, **Jackie Moore**, and **Roxxi Laveaux**, as well as newcomers **ODB**, **Talia Madison**, **Angel Williams**, **Shelly Martinez** (formerly known as Ariel in ECW), and **Awesome Kong**.

Kong (of all women!) experienced an upper-level wardrobe malfunction when Kim, ODB, and Williams forced her over the top rope. Ultimately, the final two were Kim and Laveaux. Kim applied an octopus submission to no avail, and Laveaux' power bomb into a bridge attempt



Cornette screwed Angle again

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

***The TNA World
champion again***

Photo by Lee South TNA Wrestling



Does Tony Atlas even know who this guy is?



was unsuccessful. In the end, Kim executed a fireman's carry into a backdrop to pin Laveaux and become the first-ever TNA women's champion.

In other matches at Bound for Glory, **Abyss** slammed **Raven** into glass and tacks to win a four-way "Monster's Ball" match also involving **Black Reign** and **Rhino** ... **Samoa Joe** handed **Christian Cage** his first submission loss in TNA ... **The Steiner Brothers** beat **Team 3D** in a two-out-of-three-fall tag team tables match ... X division champion **Jay Lethal** pinned **Christopher Daniels** ... **A.J. Styles** and **Travis Tomko** won the World tag team title from **Ron Killings**, **Pacman Jones**, and **Rasheed Lucius Creed**, who was allowed to join the team because the Tennessee Titans still weren't allowing Jones to wrestle ... **Eric Young** won a 16-man battle royal ... **The Latin American Exchange** beat **Elix Skipper** and **Senshi** to become the top contenders to the TNA tag title.

The fallout from the **Chris Benoit** tragedy continues to affect WWE. The latest is that the Georgia Athletic and Entertainment Commission may opt to close a two-year loophole that has allowed WWE to be exempt from state regulations. A statute, put in place in 2005, excluded groups with total assets of more than \$25-million from the commission's jurisdiction.

Commission member **Cary Ichter** is citing health and safety issues in his effort to close the loophole. If Ichter's name sounds familiar to you, he happens to be the lawyer for **Michael Benoit**, the father of Chris Benoit. "When you look at all the health issues of professional wrestlers and how many of them have died, it's clear they've been abused," Ichter told *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Longtime WWE attorney **Jerry McDevitt** viewed Ichter's motion as just more of the same. "Gee, surprise, surprise," he said. "Wonder why he's doing that?"

While it is obvious that Ichter's interest stems from his involvement in the Benoit matter, he could force the issue so WWE wrestlers are subject to the same drug testing and many of the same regulations that govern boxers and mixed martial arts fighters.

On a much lighter note, the lovely **Lillian Garcia** has embarked on a publicity tour to plug her first full-length album, *Quiero Vivir*, which means "I Want To Live." **Vince McMahon** thought of the idea to release WWE's first Spanish-language compact disc when he heard Garcia sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" in Spanish at the beginning of New Year's Revolution 2005, which was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

During an interview with wrestlingepicenter.com, Garcia exclaimed, "Oh, I'm so excited! This is what I've always wanted and getting it was so hard. Knowing the right people, networking, and all those things coming into play ... So, finally for those things to finally click makes an album that I am so, so proud of. I can honestly say I love every song on the album!"

A very weird incident occurred backstage at a recent Ohio Valley Wrestling taping in Louisville. **Tony Atlas**, who achieved his greatest fame in the WWF a generation ago, was recently sent to the OVW developmental program in a mentoring capacity. Charged with the task of helping up-and-comers make the transition from the developmental territory to the big leagues, "Mr. U.S.A." allegedly directed a few critical comments toward the younger talent.

Specifically, Atlas lambasted **C.M. Punk**—who was on hand for the taping—for not taping up his hand and wrist correctly. According to bystanders, this slowly built into a loud argument, with Atlas angrily telling Punk that he had a bad attitude and would never cut it on WWE television. Apparently, Atlas was not aware that Punk was the ECW champion and the centerpiece of a weekly show on the SciFi Channel.

The following week, WWE released trainer **Robert Gibson**. According to 1wrestling.com, company officials were upset that the former Rock 'n' Roll Express member

The Briscoes are better as a unit

Photo by George Tahinos



let the situation get out of control.

Beyond the locker room and in the Davis Arena, where it really matters, **Atlas DaBone** has emerged as a challenger for Ohio Valley champion **Mike Krue**. DaBone interrupted a celebration that Krue was holding for his Team America faction. The upstart said it was high time that he and his "Boneyard" got a shot at the championship. When Krue sent Team America after him, DaBone jumped in the ring and pummeled the champ. Later, he threw a cake in the face of **Milena Roucka** for good measure.

Also, congratulations go out to "Manbeast" **Ted McNailer**, who upset **Shawn Spears** for the OVW TV title in September. I bet Cody Rhodes was glad to hear that news!

Speaking of title changes, a major one occurred on October 6 in Edison, New Jersey, where **Nigel McGuinness** defeated **Takeshi Morishima** for the Ring of Honor championship. This is easily the biggest win of his career, but McGuinness appears quite ready for the challenge. He'd better be, too, because **Bryan Danielson** (who scored a recent win over **Chris Hero**) and Austin Aries (who scored a recent win over Danielson) are demanding title shots.

Incidentally, we might have seen the last of **Matt Cross** in ROH for a while. **Davey Richards** and **Rocky Romero** beat Cross and **Erick Stevens** in a tag team match with a stipulation that the loser of the fall had to leave the company for 60 days.

By the way, if anyone sees **Mark Briscoe**, tell him that

NEWS ANALYSIS

ANOTHER LIGHTNING-STRIKE CHAMP?

I've always referred to Shohei "Giant" Baba as the NWA's "lightning-strike champ." He managed to win the NWA World title three times—in 1974, 1979, and 1980—but didn't hold the strap for more than a week on any of those occasions. In the past year, Sting has held the NWA title for less than a month and the TNA belt for only two days. Come on, "Stinger," you can do better than that!

WHAT A GAIL! TNA couldn't have a better representative for its fledgling women's division than Gail Kim. She's smart, sassy, and stylish, and WWE made a big mistake by releasing her two years ago. Remember, this is the same person who defeated Jazz for the WWE women's title in her Raw debut in 2003. She has waited for a women's division to take shape in TNA, and she has been rewarded for her patience.

A BURDEN ON HIS SHOULDERS. I was surprised to learn that Tony Atlas had joined the training team in Ohio Valley. No offense to Tony, but I wonder why WWE insists on blowing the dust off these veterans and expects them to prepare today's rising stars for WWE in 2007. About a year ago, Greg Gagne served as booker briefly, yet his antiquated notions prompted his early dismissal. I suppose Bob Roop will be the next guy in OYW.

AN HONORABLE PROMOTION. Ring of Honor has become the standard for excellence in wrestling, as evidenced by the reviews that ROH is getting for its Driven pay-per-view, featuring Takeshi Morishima vs. Jimmy Rave and Bryan Danielson vs. Nigel McGuinness. And its Edison, New Jersey, show—featuring McGuinness' ROH title win—is likely to be a critical success on VOD. Why can't TNA be more like this company?

II, II, III That was the chant that used to ring out in Atlanta's Omni every time Mr. Wrestling II made an appearance. This was a man who upheld the wrestling's tenets of sportsmanship and decency. Heck, he was even friends with Miss Lillian, Jimmy Carter's mother. I yearn for the days when pro wrestling had a moral compass. At least Hawaii will be kept pure for the time being.

his big brother needs him. As Mark recovered from a motorcycle incident, **Jay Briscoe** was forced to battle Combat Zone Wrestling's **Necro Butcher** on consecutive nights in October. Jay lost to Butcher in decisive fashion in Boston and went on to suffer a miserable defeat to Butcher in a bloodbath in Edison, New Jersey.

The Briscoe Brothers are always more effective as a team. Case in point: As ROH tag team champions, Mark

and Jay have been ranked between number four and number six in pwi-online.com's weekly ratings for the past several months.

News from Memphis Wrestling: **Jerry Lawler** appears headed for a major feud with **Kevin White**, whom he accuses of being a "Nature Boy ripoff" ... Longtime Memphis veteran **Derrick King** has formed an alliance with **Rashard Devon** and **Johnny Dotson** ... **Reggie B. Fine** has joined **Cory Macklin** as color commentator on Memphis Wrestling's weekly broadcast.

This 'n' that: WWE has wished **Daivari** "the best in all his future endeavors" ... The October 8 edition of Raw dropped to an alarmingly low 2.8. Get well soon, **John Cena**! ... By the way, the latest on the former Raw champion is that his pectoral tear could cause him to miss up to a year ... TNA World champ Kurt Angle was arrested for driving under the influence in his Cadillac Escalade in Moon Township, Pennsylvania ... **Joey Matthews (Mercury)** is headed for TNA ... **Hulk Hogan** has been tapped as the host of the new *American Gladiators*, and **Daniel Puder** and Matt Cross have already tried out to be gladiators ... **The Rock**, **Evan "Strangler" Lewis**, and St. Louis promoter **Tom Packs** have earned induction into the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame. Be sure to check out full details in the February 2008 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, due to hit newsstands on January 1.

From the Retire That Masked Man Dept.: Can you believe this? **Mr. Wrestling II** emerged from retirement to compete at a Hawaii Championship Wrestling event on October 13 in Wahiawa, Hawaii. While I'm sure that Wrestling II's trademark white-and-black mask hid most of his wrinkles, I would have assumed that his million-dollar kneelift is worth only a few bucks now. Not so. The 74-year-old veteran was in fighting form, as he teamed with another mystery man—known as **Mr. Wrestling III**—to



Rock knew he was headed for the HOF

defeat the team of **Manu Samoa** for the HCW tag team title. Considering that the "Paragon Of Probity" currently lives in Hawaii, he should be around for plenty of title defenses in the future.

"I can't believe the promoters convinced me to do this match, but I showed the world that those kids shouldn't be too cocky," II said. "Manu Samoa is going to have a long career and, if I showed them one thing, it is to be humble."

Before we part, I'd like to send my most heartfelt wishes to **Tadao Yasuda**, the sumo-turned-pro wrestler who is best known for upsetting **Yuji Nagata** for the IWGP title in 2002. The 44-year-old Yasuda attempted suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills on October 5. He is recovering in a hospital in Kawasaki, Japan.

I also extend my sympathies to the family and friends of **Sean "Shocker" Evans**, who died of lung cancer on October 2 at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. The 36-year-old Evans, who was not a smoker, was a protégé of **Dusty Rhodes** and a fixture on the Georgia independent scene. He had also been a preliminary wrestler for WWE and the old ECW.

That's all for now. Save a ring-side seat for me. □



Hawaii's favorite masked man

RICK STEINER

HEIGHT: 5'11"

WEIGHT: 280

HOMETOWN: Detroit, MI

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: February 9, 1998—teaming with his brother, Scott, to defeat Scott Hall and Kevin Nash for the WCW World tag team title in El Paso, Texas. The Steiner Brothers already were multi-time tag champs, but they were just about the only guys who could take on the NWO and win. It was a big victory for WCW overall.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Steiner goes back to ol' reliable. From barking around the ring to yelling, "Want some? Get some!" to his opponents, Steiner makes fans think it's 1998 all over again. Sure, we're stretching to give the "Dog-Faced Gremlin" a compliment here, but at least Steiner realizes he's strictly a nostalgia act at this point.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: If

Steiner has any hope of winning the TNA World tag team title with his brother, he will have to drop several pounds. He weighed 248 pounds in his prime, and now he's 30 pounds over that. He simply won't have the endurance to keep pace with A.J. Styles or even Travis Tomko.

PET FINISHER: Bulldog off the top rope

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: The toughest match of The Steiners' comeback occurred only a short time ago: their best-of-three-fall tables match against Team 3D at Bound for Glory. Rick cost his team the first fall when he was 3D'd through a table, but he rebounded in the final fall, sending Brother Ray through a table with a bulldog off the top rope.

OUTLOOK FOR 2008: It would be fun to believe that Rick and Scott could make a long, sustained run in TNA in 2008, but that isn't realistic. Well into their 40s, The Steiners can show only shades of their former brilliance—and that's good enough for now.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "When Rick comes out to that ring, the Impact Zone turns into a veritable dog pound. The fans love to see him, and if he can surprise people with some big wins, all of that is a bonus at this stage of his career." —Don West



DAVE TAYLOR

HEIGHT: 6'3"

WEIGHT: 256

HOMETOWN: Yorkshire, England

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: June 4, 1991—defeating Dave Finlay for the All-Star Promotions British heavyweight title in King's Lynn, England. He held the belt for nearly two years before he lost it to Tony St. Clair in Croydon. As champion, Taylor was partly responsible for the resurgence in British wrestling in the 1990s.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Taylor sticks to a quintessentially British style, making only a few modifications to adapt to the WWE style. His looping European uppercuts and inventive use of fireman's carries make his style stand out on the Smackdown roster. It's too bad WWE doesn't reward him with a better push.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: There are two primary reasons why Taylor hasn't fared better in WWE: his age and his slow-paced style. Officials simply won't push a wrestler if he doesn't have a handle on WWE's frenetic, bounce-off-the-ropes style. If Taylor wants to thrive in the WWE environment, he has to pick up the pace.

PET FINISHER: Double-underhook suplex

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Taylor took a big career risk by leaving England to compete in WCW. As "Squire" David Taylor, and the partner of Steven (William) Regal, he delivered exciting, solid matches, but didn't make serious headway. Davey Boy Smith, for one, dominated Taylor, so he couldn't even claim to be the best British wrestler in WCW.

OUTLOOK FOR 2008: Quite frankly, Taylor's future is probably as a trainer for WWE. Taylor served as a trainer for the Deep South developmental program until that operation closed down, so it's likely he will work for the new Florida territory in the near future.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "Dave may be on the bad guy side of the ledger on Smackdown, but there's not one person in the locker room who doesn't have immense respect for him. He's as solid as it gets." —Matt Hardy



With Dave Lenker

ONE OF THE things I like best about covering professional wrestling is the unpredictability. I'll concede that far too many storylines are quite predictable, but the more you think about this wacky sport/entertainment hybrid, certain twists and turns really do defy logic.

Just when the people who run the show think they know better than the fans, they get reminded otherwise. Eventually, everyone needs to realize that the fans truly call the shots.

Exhibit A: After everything he has accomplished and proven, John Cena shouldn't still be getting booed as often and as passionately as he does. Yet, booed he was. They only cheered when Vince McMahon declared the Raw World title vacant because Cena had undergone surgery for a torn pectoral muscle, an injury that would put him out of action for six months to a year.

Exhibit B: The Undertaker persona never should have had 17 years (and counting) of shelf life. But the "Dead Man" is about as hot as ever, even when he's feuding with a lead anchor named Mark Henry.

Exhibit C: Judging from looks alone, Bryan Danielson shouldn't be such an amazing wrestler (not even on the

Ring of Honor level). Yet he's an absolute master inside the ring.

No one can really predict accurately and consistently who will appeal to fans, for how long, to what extent, or even in what form.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I present to you my next exhibit, Mr. Ron Simmons. The man, who at some point in the past year it seems, lost his ability to utter any and all words not ending in "-am" or, technically speaking, "-amn."

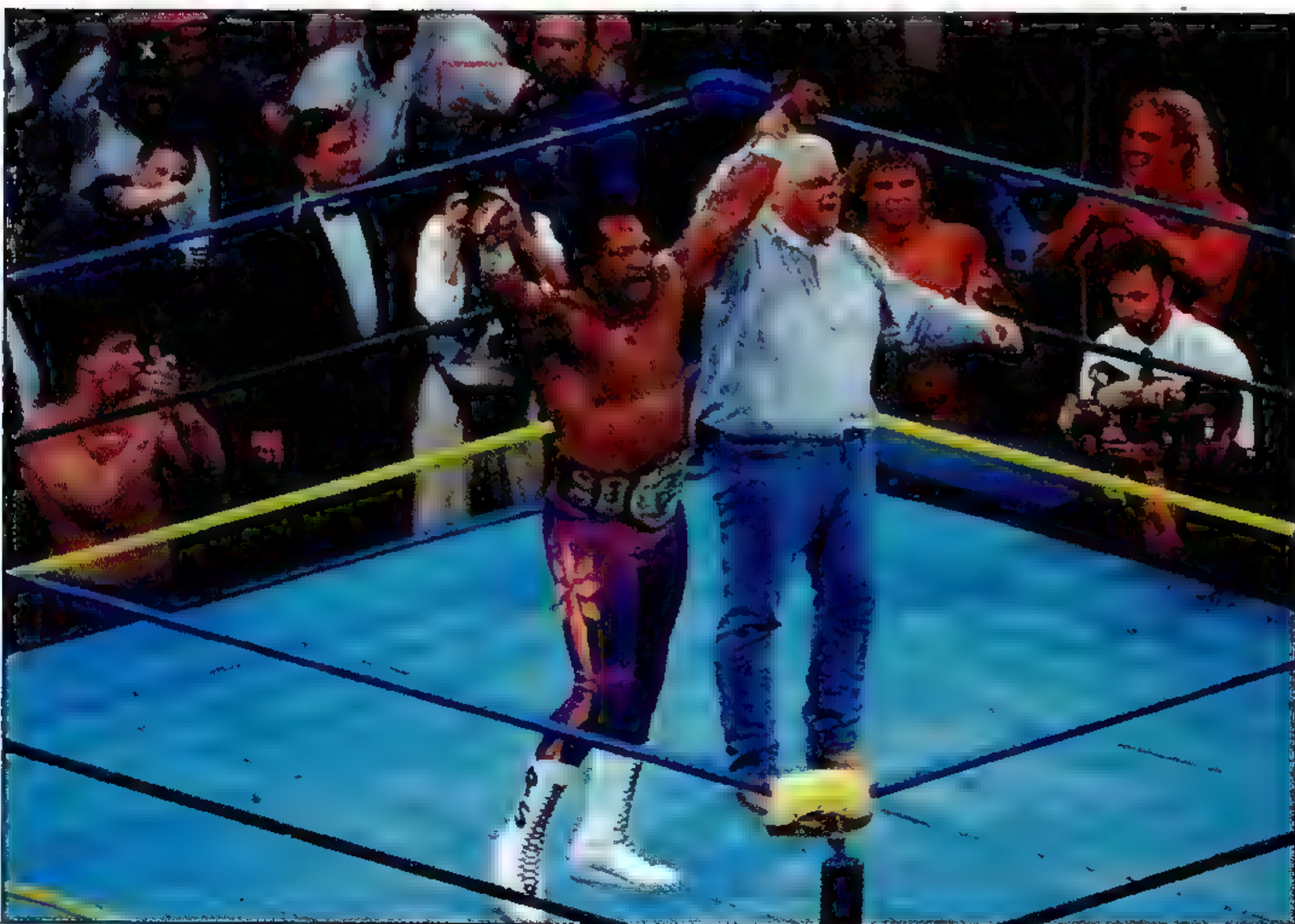
And this was a positive development.

That's right, a guy with such a limited vocabulary, a guy who really doesn't wrestle anymore, a guy who almost exclusively wears T-shirts featuring only his favorite word in the world (that's "Damn!" for those of you who haven't been paying attention), and a guy whose major talent seems to be knowing when and how long to pause for dramatic effect before uttering that word is arguably one of the most popular WWE personalities in 2007.

Yes, he's more popular in 2007 doing all those stupid things than he was 15 years prior as WCW World heavy-weight champion, back when the Ted Turner-owned company decided he could sell a lot of tickets and pay-

per-views. Still, I doubt even Simmons would make the claim today that he has been responsible for selling even a single WWE ticket, PPV, or anything else in 2007. Okay, perhaps a "Damn!" T-shirt or two.

Simmons' stint as WCW World champion ended before I was hired as associate editor of this magazine in 1993, so I was not privy to any inside information on the night in 1992 when Simmons shockingly captured the championship. By the time I was hired, his reign had gone quietly into the history books, Big Van Vader was again atop WCW, and a few people were still wondering how the charisma-challenged Simmons



The shock of August 1992 was Ron Simmons' defeat of Big Van Vader for the WCW World championship. That was the height of Simmons' in-ring career, but the glory was short-lived. It seemed to fans at the time that Simmons lacked charisma. That certainly is not the case today.



With his move to the WWF, Rori Simmons became Faarooq Asad, accompanied by Sunny. Unfortunately, Faarooq's "helmet of power" couldn't grant him the respect he craved from the fans.

ever got shown the path to the top of the mountain.

The former Florida State football standout's interviews were, to be kind, tough to sit through. He had the power-based wrestling skill and the intensity and desire to be a complete superstar, but his interview delivery fell apart, and people didn't respond enthusiastically to him.

Simmons soon slipped back down to mid-card status. He eventually left WCW, made a few forgettable appearances in ECW, and eventually landed in the WWF as Faarooq Asad, the protégé of Sunny (Tammy Sytch). If you never saw him in that incarnation, he looked like a futuristic gladiator warrior-type, if that makes any sense, complete with ridiculous getup and headgear that a few of us jokingly termed the "helmet of power."

His stint as head of the racially charged Nation of Domination wasn't a huge success, so again he changed his persona and became—along with Bradshaw (the future JBL)—one of the then-evil Undertaker's Acolytes. They eventually became protection for hire as the Acolyte Protection Agency in WWE. Back in those days, Simmons began uttering "Damn!" in various backstage

skits, but he did so in the context of normal conversation.

As Bradshaw became JBL, Simmons' in-ring career quietly ended. He took a job as a backstage agent, and here we are getting a "Damn!" or two every Monday night at least.

What a strange charisma Simmons has discovered. What a strange but effective chemistry he has discovered with young Santino Marella. Somehow, I think, Marella is going to come out of this bizarre feud the better for the experience.

I doubt he's going to be a better technical wrestler because of it (he and Simmons have had one match as of this writing), and he might not learn much from sharing ring space with Simmons, but he will be perceived as a bigger star. I'm not sure Simmons had the power to elevate stars even when he held the WCW championship, but he has a little bit of it as a result of, well, not having to do much. Mess with Simmons now and people want to see him get a little revenge and toss out a few of those mildest of expletives along the way. That, in part, is what has made Marella such an effective heel so quickly.

For more than a decade, some very prominent bookers and alleged creative geniuses couldn't figure it out with Simmons. They tried and tried again with the angry and intense approach and ignored the dry wit that he must have had all along. I'm not suggesting Simmons is a megastar that never was, but maybe could have been. His current comedy skits work best in small doses, and WWE has come close to over-exposing him in recent months.

I'm just wondering what might have happened if Simmons had been able to merge the physical skills he had in 1992 with a fraction of the crowd connection he found in 2007. I imagine there must be days when Simmons wonders as well. But, after his match with Marella in late-September on Raw (which, surprisingly, ended with Marella bailing), his body probably reminded him why he took the agent job and why a full-time comeback isn't an option.

Still, I'm almost embarrassed to say I enjoy Simmons more now than I ever did in the past. I'm sure he's enjoying himself these days, too. I was tempted to track him down after a show to ask him if he is, but I think I know what his response would be. Dramatic pause and then ... "I am." □

By Brandi Mankiewicz

WISH I could bring back the old column "We Accuse" for just this issue of *INSIDE WRESTLING*. I have a lot of accusations that I need to make—so this column is not going to be pretty. My venom comes forth thanks to the fallout from the Benoit family tragedy. Yep, it just keeps getting worse. From the circus in Atlanta surrounding who died first to the swarming smackdown bestowed upon the WWE roster due to people not knowing the difference between vitamins and highly illegal substances. Now, allow me a few moments

to firmly attach my Doc Maartens to my feet so I can get ready to stomp a mud hole—or, rather, several of them.

I ACCUSE: Chris Benoit. Okay, I must start somewhere and this seems like a logical place. For as much respect as I will always have for the "Canadian Crippler," I find it difficult to absolve him from my admonishment. If it weren't for Chris and his bad weekend at home, the WWE roster wouldn't be depleted through steroid suspensions. Had he just dealt with his inner demons by seeing a specialist, we might all still have a full roster.

I ACCUSE: The Mainstream Media. I challenge any of these idiots to actually learn something about a subject matter instead of glancing at it long enough to formulate a completely asinine theory. As a journalist, I do my best to objectively study a subject before putting fingers to keyboard. Instead, the horde of overpaid jackasses would rather chase the easy story, failing to check credibility, in order to be the first to get something out to the masses. Hell, it sounds a lot like the highly unreliable Internet. The sad part is that I hold even the crappiest of wrestling "news" sites in higher esteem than most major media outlets at this point.

I ACCUSE: The Federal Government. Don't worry, I'll keep my accusations limited to professional wrestling only. Otherwise, you'll be here for days reading about my displeasure with the current state of affairs in the United States. I don't care to have the federal government wasting time—and my tax money—looking into anything other than how to balance the budget, ending this pointless war, and impeaching the President. There is no reason for our legislators to be wasting time posturing about the subject of steroids. I don't care who they're after: WWE, Major League Baseball, or jai alai. I have already written to my legislators to stay out of it. I suggest you do the same.



If a 62-year-old that looks like this doesn't convince you that Vince McMahon is looking for unnatural bodies, then you are probably on the same chemicals that have caused half of the WWE roster to be suspended.

I ACCUSE: ESPN. Yes, I do hold ESPN accountable. This media outlet does have probably the best grasp on the steroid situation of any group, but I still see them as part of the problem. They fanny-smack those who get caught with illegal enhancement drugs, yet there are many hours dedicated to the art of bodybuilding. Sure, these muscleheads use supplements that are Mickey Mouse-approved, but they still promote an image that 99 percent of the world will never attain. I'd love to see a parental warning at the beginning of any bodybuilding contest that states, "The following may induce body dysmorphia in those less genetically blessed or those who don't have 900 hours a day to work out." Which leads me to my next victim ...

I ACCUSE: Hollywood. Whatever happened to the natural look? Whether it's a young, out-of-control celeb butard or an aging star undergoing a completely stupid cosmetic surgery, Hollywood is to blame. It's about time this industry took the lead in stepping back into the realm of the normal world instead of perpetuating images that are unattainable to those of us who do not walk on water. I am blessed with good looks and a thin build, but I understand the pressure felt by those around me. While I can eat what I want, most can't, and that sucks.

I ACCUSE: Vince McMahon. I would love to know just how many subscription copies of *Muscle & Fitness* are addressed to a McMansion in Greenwich, Connecticut. Vince has always had a fascination with bulky muscleheads. Hell, he's one, too. He falls for the same crap everyone else does. Ever since the conception of sports entertainment, Vince McMahon has promoted those who look the part—and has left those with more talent on the side and in back. Don't believe me? Take this little quiz: Who is better: Hulk Hogan or Dean Malenko? If you voted for that overpaid windbag, you're an idiot. Hulk Hogan couldn't chain-wrestle his way out from a wet 'do rag.

I ACCUSE: The Fans. I don't expect much from you, the fans. I read your letters. I see you wearing Austin 3:16 shirts as you get taken to jail. I watch you debate the intricacies of the sport in forms of "Uh-huh" and "Nuh-uh." You're all morons. You're also a



People wonder why the WWE women's division is so lame lately. It's because WWE is catering to an image-obsessed audience. Wrestling's version of Rachael Ray, Mickie James, was just as cute and spunky before the new boobs. Why'd she need to change?

major part of the problem. Younger fans today have never known wrestlers to look like Dick Murdoch or Nick Bockwinkel. Fans think the better wrestlers are enhanced in some way—whether it's through something as simple as a tan or something more sinister, like a boob job. Really people, girls like Melina, Beth Phoenix, and Mickie James, etc., all looked fine before their big-money contracts. What did bigger boobs really add in terms of wrestling and overall theatrics? Unfortunately, most of you are too stupid to go to a strip club to see Frankenhooters.

Losing a crapload of the roster to Wellness Policy violations is crap. If the pressure to be bigger weren't in place from so many outside sources, maybe this whole thing wouldn't have happened. Will the use of muscle-enhancing products end because of this? Probably not. I think the problem is deeply rooted in our society. Until we train ourselves—and our children—to know that it's okay to look normal, we'll never overcome this problem. There will always be others to accuse. □

SAMOA JOE HAS worked very hard for all the good fortune in his career, earning respect on the independent scene before enjoying the national spotlight with TNA ... Played football and competed in judo at a young age ... Trained under Cincinnati Red in California ... Defeated Uncle Jess Hansen in his debut in December 1999 ... Began competing for Ultimate Pro Wrestling ... Won the UPW heavyweight title and held it for a record-setting eight months ... Competed for the So-Cal promotion, Pro Wrestling Guerrilla, and Japan's Zero-One ... Made his debut for Ring of Honor against Low-Ki (Senshi) on October 5, 2002 ... Defeated Xavier for the ROH championship on March 22, 2003 ... Held the ROH title for a record-breaking 21 months before dropping it to Austin Aries ... Began drawing the interest of both TNA and WWE ... Captured the ROH Pure championship from Jay Lethal in May 2005 ... Lost the title to Nigel McGuinness, ending his three-month reign as champ ... During that title run, Joe debuted for TNA ... Made Sonjay Dutt submit to the kokina clutch in his TNA debut at Slammiversary ... Defeated A.J. Styles at Sacrifice to become the X division's number-one contender ... Suffered a loss to NOAH's Kenta Kobashi at the October 1 ROH show ... Forced Jushin Liger into submission with the kokina clutch at Bound for Glory ... Attacked and sidelined Daniels following a tag match at Genesis ... Feuded with Styles, who took exception to the attack ... Defeated Styles

to win the X division title at Turning Point ... Continued feuding viciously with both Styles and Daniels ... Daniels beat Joe for the title in an



After being defeated by Christian Cage at TNA's No Surrender 2007 pay-per-view, Samoa Joe vents his rage by hitting Cage with a devastating muscle buster. If Joe can control his temper, he could win the TNA World title someday.

"Ultimate X" match at Destination X 2006 ... Regained the title on the April 13 *Impact*, pinning Daniels with the island driver ... Defeated Sabu at Lockdown ... Defeated Scott Steiner at Slammiversary ... Lost the X division title on *Impact*, when Senshi pinned Sonjay Dutt in a triple-threat match ... His one-on-one undefeated streak remained intact ... Defeated Monty Brown and Rhino in a three-way match at Hard Justice ... Finish came when Joe

pinned Brown ... Beat NWA World champion Jeff Jarrett in a non-title "Fans' Revenge" lumberjack match at No Surrender ... Took Jarrett's NWA title belt hostage after the match ... Pinned Raven in a "Monster's Ball" match at Bound for Glory ... Feuded with the debuting Kurt Angle ... Angle ended Joe's 17-month undefeated streak at Genesis ... Joe defeated Angle with the kokina clutch at Turning Point ... Lost to Angle, three falls to two, in a 30-minute ironman match at Final Resolution 2007 ... Pinned Homicide with an elevated muscle buster in his final ROH match on March 4 ... Challenged Christian Cage for the NWA World title at Destination X ... Was pinned by Cage, who had his feet on the ropes ... Used a kokina clutch suplex to defeat A.J. Styles at Sacrifice ... Entered the "King Of The Mountain" match for the newly christened TNA World title at Slammiversary, which Angle won ... Regained the X division title in a triple-threat match against Chris Sabin and defending champ Jay Lethal on the June 21 *Impact* ... Teamed with Angle against Team 3D in a "Match Of Champions" bout at Victory Road ... Pinned Brother Ray to gain sole control of the TNA World tag team title ... Lost all three of his championships to Angle in a "Winner Takes All" match at Hard Justice ... Began a heated feud with Christian Cage ... Attacked Cage with a muscle buster following a loss to Cage at No Surrender ... Joe has accomplished a tremendous amount during his career, leading many to believe that he'll be wearing the TNA World title belt sooner rather than later. □

SAMMOA JOE

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By Scott Teal

DON & AL GREENE

IN THE LATE-1950s through the early-'70s, Don and Al Greene were two of the most feared wrestlers in the Nashville territory. And, while this set of brothers might not have shared too many genes, they did share a passion for infuriating wrestling crowds and gaining a reputation for brutalizing their opponents.

Al Greene, whose real name is Al Denney, started wrestling when he was 14 years old at the YMCA in San Pedro, California. He spotted a wrestler with big, cauliflower ears, who was training some young men in the gym. "Come on over, and I'll show you some holds," barked the burly grappler.

One of the weightlifters cautioned Denney, "You go over there and your ears will look like his. You better stay away from him." Denney took his advice at that moment,

but began working out with the wrestler the very next day.

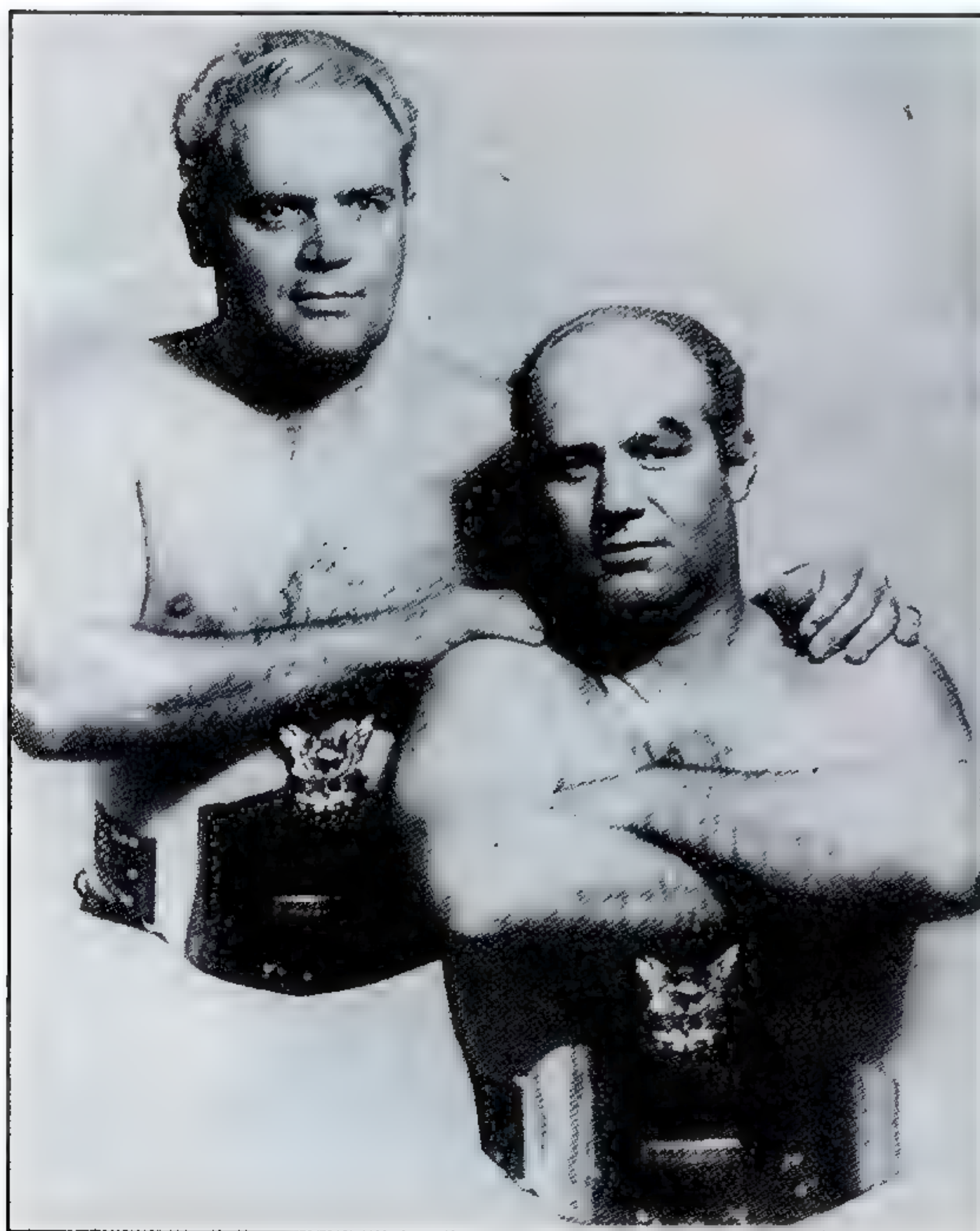
After moving to Tennessee and completing a four-year stint in the U.S. Army, Denney spoke to promoter Dick Lever, who asked him to accompany Mack York to the ring as his manager. "I jumped into the ring, did my thing, and the crowd started to throw bottles and cups," recalled Denney. "I wondered what I had got myself into!"

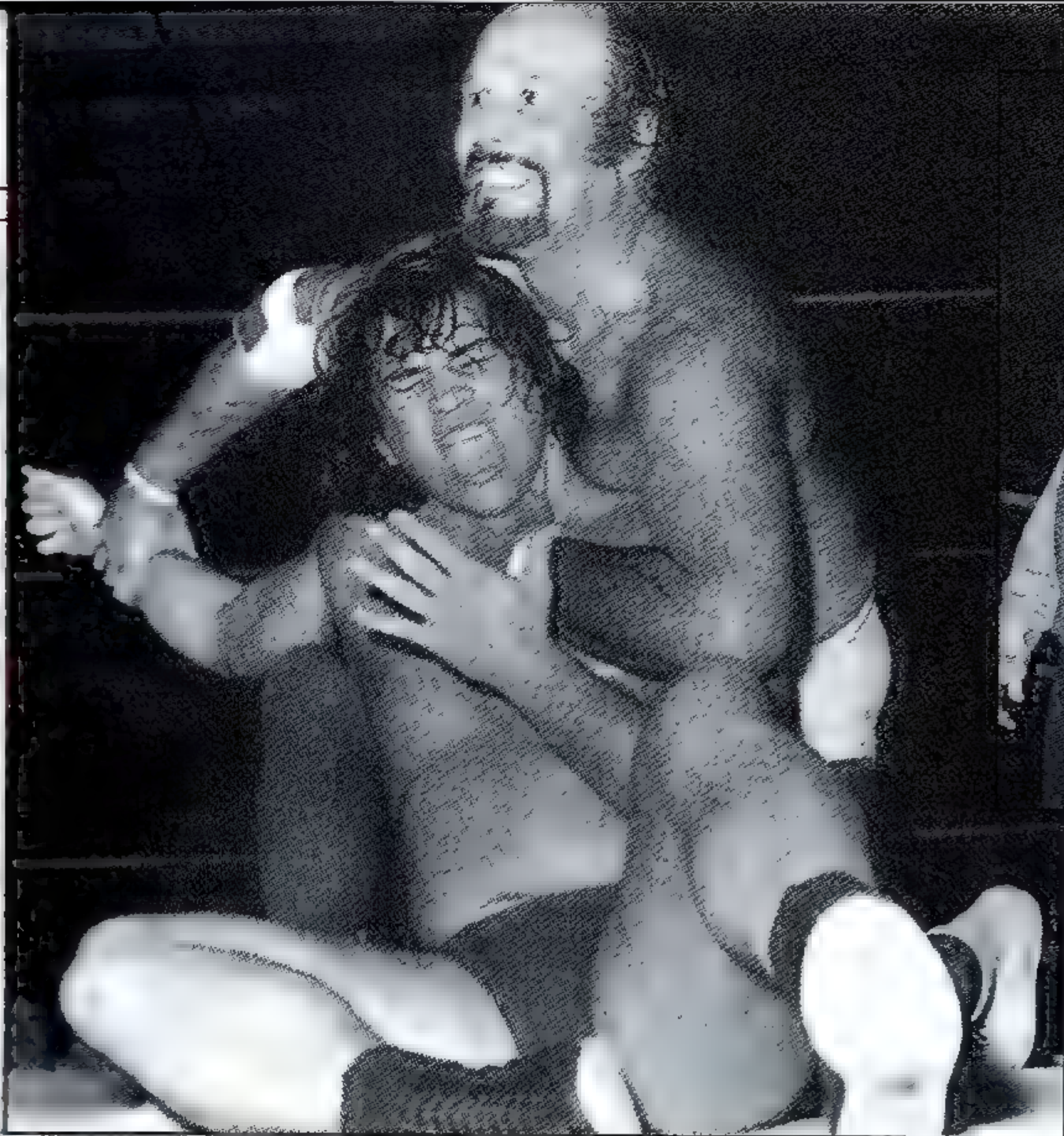
For the next three months, he wrestled as Hard Rock Denney. But his big break didn't come until he met Don Greene, who arranged for him to wrestle in Dothan, Alabama. They came upon the idea of wrestling as brothers, and their first opponents were Nick Carter and Tarzan White. According to Denney, "On our first night together, I experienced my second riot, but that was just one of many that I got involved in over the years!"

Don Greene was active in basketball, football, and baseball while in high school, and, after graduation, boxed in the semi-pro ranks for a short time at Seward Air Base. Like Denney, Greene got his start through promoter Dick Lever. "At his smaller shows, we would challenge people in the audience," Greene said. "You couldn't get away with it today, but at least one match was usually open for any fan who had a grudge against one of the wrestlers. The fan could make the challenge, and then get in the ring and fight. Lever would push that as a special attraction. There were no real rules, and it was open to anybody."

One time, Nashville promoter Nick Gulas called Greene and asked him to find a masked wrestler's outfit and drive to Birmingham. When Greene arrived, he looked at the card and realized the only masked wrestler was going to wrestle Lou Thesz! "I knew of Lou's reputation as a tough guy, so that scared me," recalled Greene. "When Lou came into the dressing room, I went over and introduced myself. I said, 'I'm Don Greene, and I'm just as green as my name.' For some reason, Thesz must have liked me, because he made me look good."

Greene and Denney agree that their careers didn't really take off until that fateful night in Dothan when they became a brother tandem. They seemed to complement each other: Don boasted a great scientific repertoire, while Al was a brawler who could use his forearms and





Don Greene chokes Jerry Brisco during an intense 1975 match in Macon, Georgia. Although Greene enjoyed his greatest successes in Tennessee and Alabama, he gained a reputation throughout the entire South.



Photo by Scott Teal

Al Greene seconds Don Fargo in the ring. By the late-1970s, he was very well known in all the southern wrestling capitals, including Memphis, Nashville, Louisville, and Mobile—and promoters were eager to cash in on his notoriety.

U.S. junior heavyweight title against Fargo in a series of vicious bouts, including chain matches and chicken-wire matches. Don was also embroiled in a singles feud with Jerry Jarrett, and the two battled in wrestling's first-ever scaffold match in Louisville.

Al Denney would go on to have many identities throughout his career. He wrestled under his real name in Houston, as Lord Albert in Cuba, as Hoss Cartwright in Panama, and as Jack Blassie in California. Although Freddie Blassie wasn't in the Golden State at the time, the promoters told Denney that he would be Blassie's brother. But the "King Of Men" didn't care for the idea upon his return. "I ain't got no brother," he snapped. That led to Blassie calling Denney an "impersonator" on television, and the two feuded throughout Southern California for a few weeks. Denney's final match took place in Louisville in 1979.

Following the advice of Jerry Jarrett, Denney saved his money from the wrestling business. He began raising cattle on a 200-acre farm in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee. He and Jeannie, his wife of more than 20 years, enjoy traveling with their camper, bass fishing, and casino gambling.

Don Greene retired from the business in 1978 and began working with former wrestling manager Saul Weingeroff at the Nashville Sheriff's Department. After that, Greene worked at his father's appliance store and as a head of security for Clubhouse Inns. Today, Greene is retired and living in Madison, Tennessee. He collects wrestling memorabilia and is a member of the Cauliflower Alley Club and Gulf Coast Wrestlers Reunion Club.

(Scott Teal publishes the newsletter "Whatever Happened To ... ?" He can be reached at P.O. Box 2781, Hendersonville, TN 37077-2781. Website: www.1wrestlinglegends.com.) □

fists. Don also thought of the team's nickname, "The Heavenly Bodies," which was later adopted by Jimmy Del Rey and Tom Prichard in Smoky Mountain Wrestling.

Older fans throughout Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky still remember the wild escapades of The Greene Brothers. In Mobile, they began wrestling with their hair dyed green. In Chattanooga, they bloodied Bearcat Wright and had their manager, Steve Clements, cover him with molasses and feathers. The Greens claim that, during their time together, fans hit them over the head with boards and chairs and cut them with knives, and one even shot at them with a .38-caliber pistol. "Sailor Art Thomas was in the dressing room when the guy started shooting," remembers Al. "He grabbed his bag and made an exit out the window. The next time I saw Art Thomas was on a plane going to Puerto Rico."

The worst riot occurred in Louisville, where Clements had disguised himself as a woman and sat at ringside. He interfered at just the right time to help The Greens score a victory. Long after the show was over, fans were on the street outside the Louisville Auditorium, screaming for Don and Al to come out. They even threw rocks at the windows of the building. "We locked the door going upstairs, but they had a battering ram, trying to knock the door down," Don said. "We were in the dressing room for a good hour-and-a-half, flat on the floor."

The Greens were a top attraction in Memphis during their feud with local star Jackie Fargo. Don defended the

With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

ORLANDO, FL: TNA finally got its coveted two-hour time slot, and I think it's going to be exactly what the company needs to take the next huge stride forward. But before TNA can get the most benefit from having two hours per week, the company will have to adjust its booking philosophy. ¶Ever since bringing *Impact* to Spike TV, TNA has tried to cram as much into every broadcast as possible. We've seen eight-man tag team matches, gauntlet matches, and a never-ending stream of wrestlers running in and inserting themselves in whatever match happens to be going on. It's admirable that TNA wants to give so many of its contracted wrestlers face-time on TV each week, but sometimes less is more. ¶The first two-hour *Impact* broadcast on October 4 also had its share of run-ins, gauntlet matches, and multiple-man matches (plus a show-long series of vignettes involving Kurt Angle attending Sting's son's football game), but it also dedicated some

time to a surprisingly good match between Rhino and Black Reign rather than rushing the match due to TV constraints. ¶TNA is like a sprinter making the transition to long distance. The key is learning how to pace itself. The beauty of the sport of wrestling is that it can't always be rushed. Matches can be over in the blink of an eye, or can last right up to the time limit. The new time slot gives TNA an opportunity to take a breath and gives its wrestlers a chance to better control the pace of a match. TNA should simply let its wrestlers wrestle.

CHARLOTTE, NC: Not with a bang, but with a whimper. ¶Is that really how the career of "Nature Boy" Ric Flair comes to an end? As I just typed Ric's name in that last sentence, I realized that I've been typing it regularly for more than three decades now. Throughout most of my career as a wrestling beat reporter (and that's been longer than I care to admit), Flair has been the one constant. ¶I've seen



RIC FLAIR

a lot of changes in this sport. I've seen wrestling bears and 90-minute best-of-three-falls bouts, and I've seen six-sided rings and "Ultimate X" matches, and I've seen just about everything in between. But from the moment he came back from that plane crash in 1975, Flair consistently has been one of the top names in the sport. ¶After a half-dozen apparent retirements, it now looks like Flair's career may finally come to an end. Flair is considering asking for his release from WWE, and a recent meeting between Flair and Vince McMahon left the two sides even further apart. ¶I have no doubt Ric will be fine without wrestling, but will wrestling be fine without the "Nature Boy"?

CHICAGO, IL: No Mercy was one of the wildest, most unpredictable pay-per-views WWE has delivered in a long time. By the time the capacity crowd filed out of the Allstate Arena, they had seen the Raw World title change hands three times before finally winding up around the waist of Randy Orton. As far as I'm concerned, Orton's waist is exactly where that belt belongs. ¶I haven't exactly been the biggest Orton supporter out there, but the kid is starting to finally realize the incredible potential he first displayed back in his rookie days in Ohio Valley. Orton has a tremendous pedigree as a third-generation wrestler and has been groomed for greatness since he was old enough to brush his own teeth. ¶It took him a

while, but Orton has finally realized who he really is. Underneath it all, Orton is a pure sadist with no respect for anyone other than himself. That may make him a lousy human being, but he has turned into one hell of a wrestler. ¶After numerous suspensions and reprimands by WWE for his unprofessional behavior, Orton has found a way to channel that hatred, that inner rage, and use it in the ring. Instead of trashing hotel rooms or taunting co-workers, Orton has focused all of those violent tendencies to his wrestling game, and that—along with his incredible athleticism—has made him Raw World champion.

Jones and Killings held the TNA World tag team title. That tells you about the state of affairs in TNA these days. ¶I can't imagine a wrestling league bringing in somebody so notorious back when I was a cub reporter. It would've been like Al Capone being in a six-man tag with the Duseks. In the '70s, it would've been like having Patty Hearst wrestle Moolah. At least when wrestling brought in somebody from the outside, it was people with sports credibility like Alex Karras or Muhammad Ali. Don't give me this second-chance malarky or this reflection of society nonsense. TNA had a choice. And it made the wrong one. □



RANDY ORTON

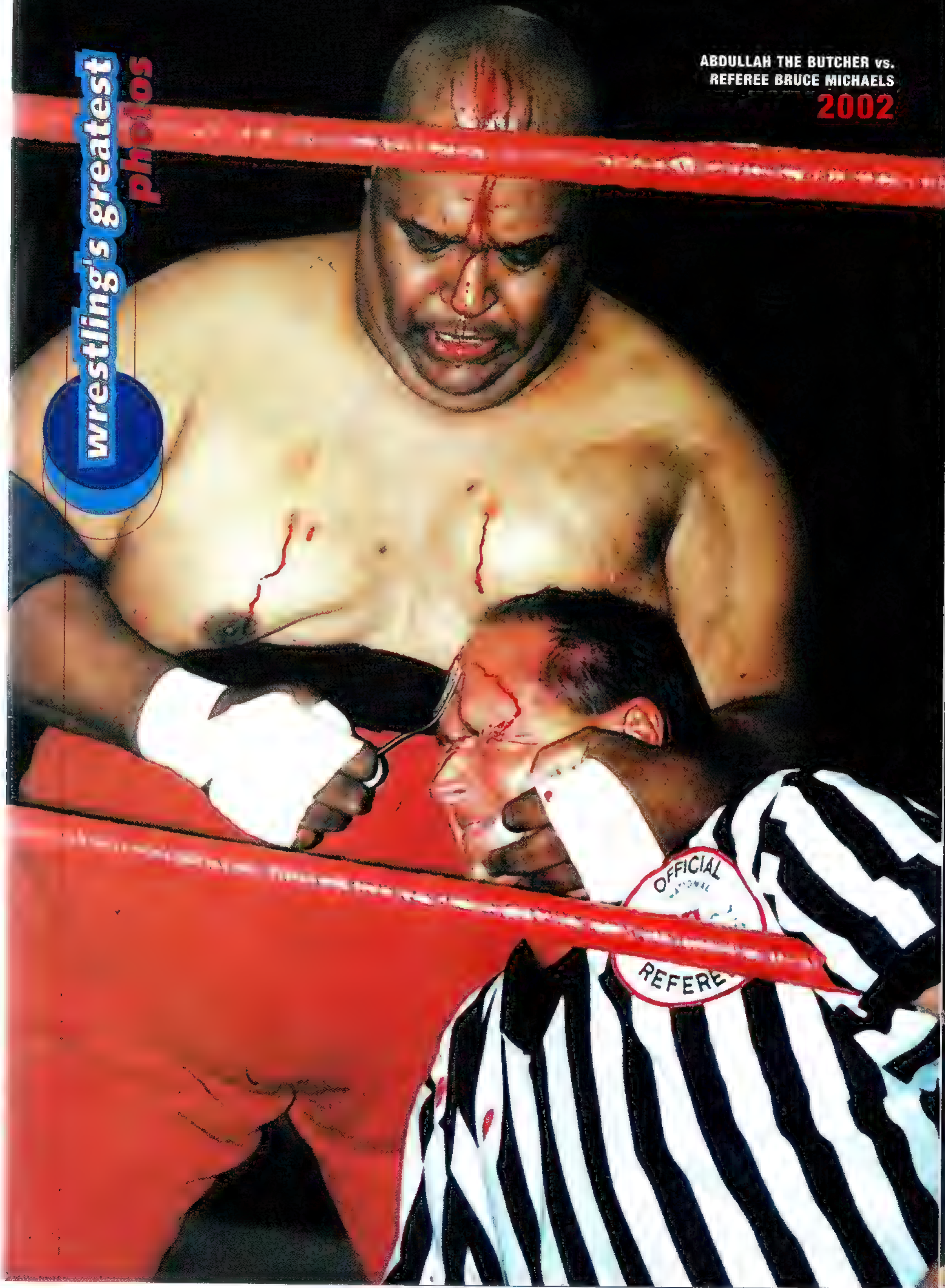
ATLANTA, GA: The latest word regarding "Pacman" Jones in TNA is that Tom Urbanski, the guy who was paralyzed during an incident involving Jones in a nightclub, is suing Jones and the NFL. Good for him. I don't know much about Urbanski, but he is a former pro wrestler, and I somehow feel a kinship with anybody who laces the boots, and I particularly don't like the fact that this guy is suffering. ¶I don't know what TNA ever expected to get out of Jones because he has been in a number of matches at this point, yet always hops, skips, and jumps out of harm's way because the Tennessee Titans won't allow him to wrestle. They brought in this clown named Rasheed Lucius Creed to team with Jones and Ron Killings against A.J. Styles and Travis Tomko. For the first time in a long time, I was cheering like hell for Styles. I can't believe

wrestling's greatest

photos

ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER vs.
REFEREE BRUCE MICHAELS

2002

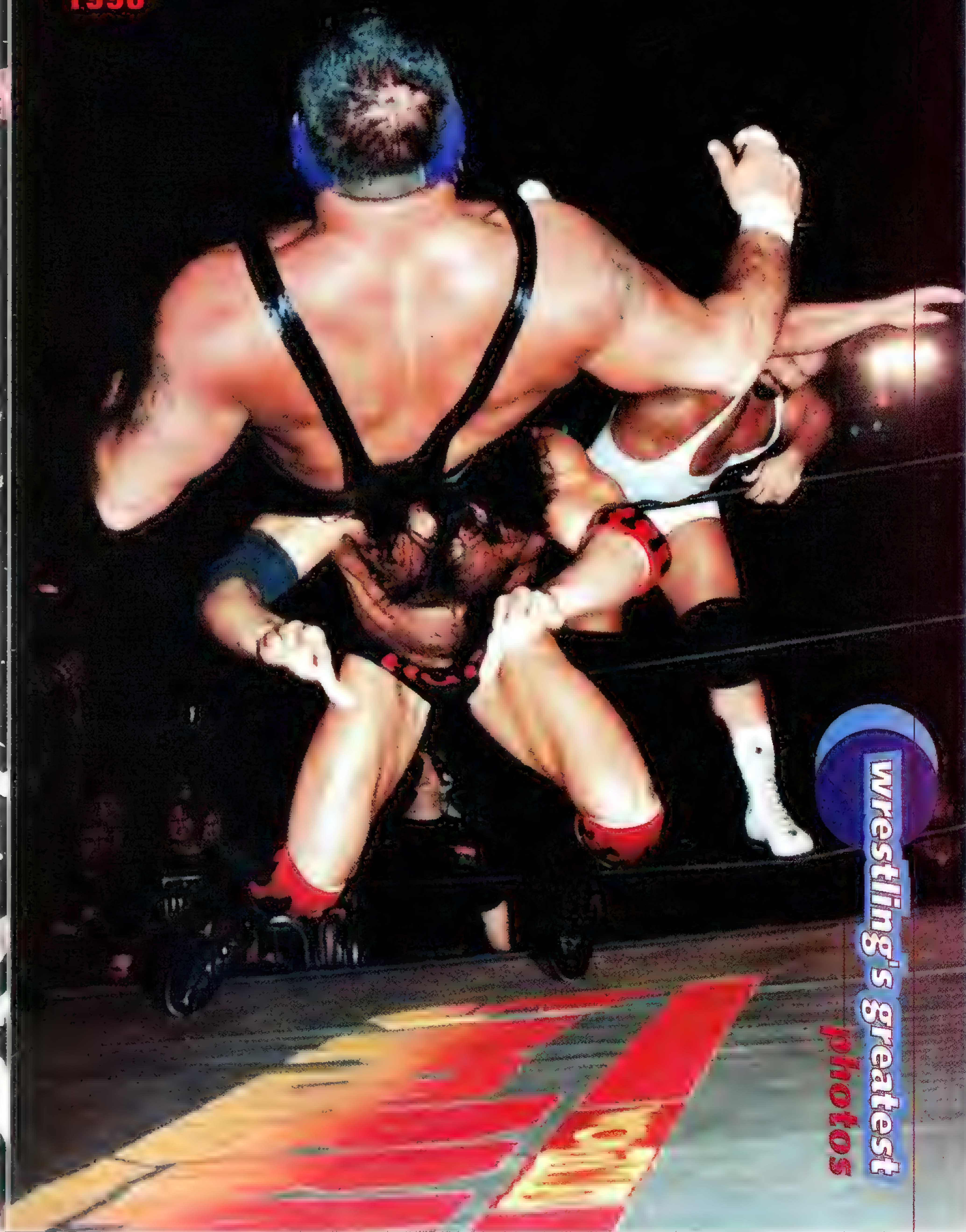


SCOTT HALL vs. RICK STEINER

1998



wrestling's greatest
photos




THE MONROE, ONE THE TWO
BILLION DOLLAR, BACK
SHAW, & THE LAY
KINGDOM (STANDING)

1975

wrestling's greatest
photos





wrestling's greatest

photos

1953

wrestling's greatest
photos

IVAN KOLOFF vs. DICK MURDOCH

1983



CHARLIE HAAS vs. BROCK LESNAR

2003



Wrestling's Greatest
Photos

Presenting the



Section compiled by Dan Murphy

FRANK CONSTANZA WAITED until Festivus for his annual "Airing Of Grievances." Unlike George Costanza's dad on *Seinfeld*, we here at INSIDE WRESTLING simply can't hold our grievances that long. By the time Thanksgiving rolls around, we can't wait to take some of the sport's top names to task for some of the ridiculous things they have done over the course of the year.

With our annual Turnbuckle Turkey Awards, we single out the 10 biggest turkeys of the past 12 months and hold them up to be judged in the court of public opinion. We're not simply looking at garden-variety heels here, either. We're looking at 10 individuals whose actions, arrogance, or foolishness have given pro wrestling a bad name.

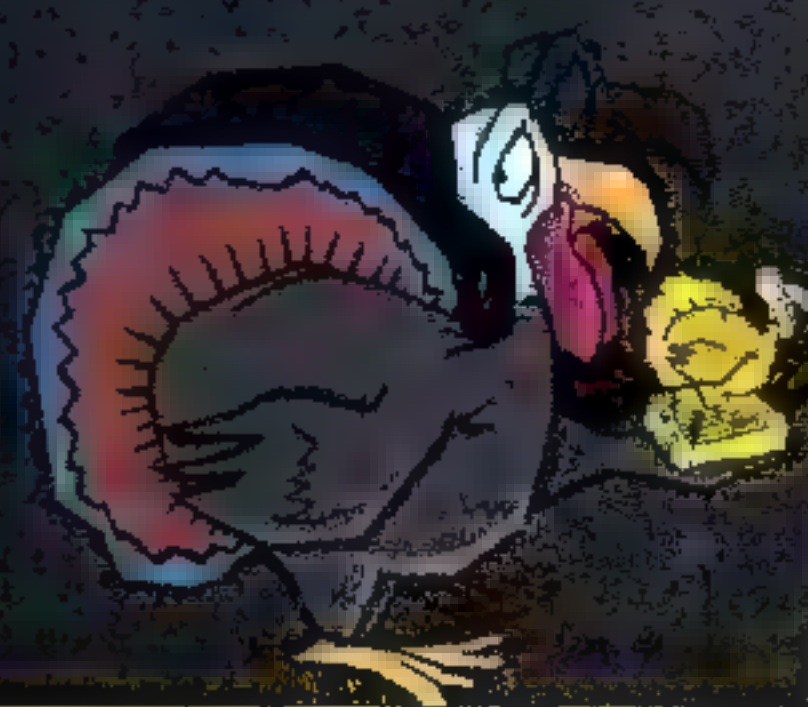
Take, for instance, Vince McMahon. The WWE chairman was responsible for a variety of ignoble transgressions in 2007, not the least of which was faking his own death to court sympathy and get his name mentioned in the media. By trying to pass off a clearly staged "car bomb" as the nationally televised murder of a public figure, McMahon demonstrated an appalling lack of respect for the intelligence of his fans.

It was a bad year for promoters all the way around as both Dixie Carter and Antonio Inoki also received Turnbuckle Turkeys—Carter for

signing Adam "Pacman" Jones to a wrestling contract and Inoki for misrepresenting a title belt as being the authentic IWGP title. And just because Wrestling Society X went the way of the dodo doesn't mean we forgot about Kevin Kleinrock, the co-creator of the short-lived MTV wrestling experiment. In his efforts to publicize WSX, Kleinrock made one of the most wildly inaccurate predictions of the year. Want to know what Kleinrock said? You can read it yourself just a few pages from here.

And, of course, we didn't shy away from critiquing the wrestlers, either. Ken Kennedy praised the effectiveness of the WWE Wellness Policy ... and then got suspended for violating that same policy. And we let Jay Lethal know just what we think of his "Black Machismo."

We want to know what you think of this year's awards. Please write to us at Turnbuckle Turkeys, Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034, or e-mail us at insideletters@yahoo.com. And now, let our annual "Airing Of Grievances" begin!



KURT ANGLE

First things first: Kurt Angle deserves a lot of credit for everything he has accomplished in TNA over the past year. He popped the bubble of invincibility Samoa Joe had built around himself. He won the TNA World title, the TNA World tag team title, the X division title, and the IWGP 3rd Belt to boot. He silenced every critic who thought he was damaged goods after being released by WWE in 2006.

Unfortunately, like a slug trailing a fine line of slime, Angle seems strangely compelled to leave a stain of controversy everywhere he goes.

First, he introduced his wife, Karen, to TNA viewers and proceeded to browbeat her and their daughter for weeks. Finally, when it looked like Karen was at her breaking point and demanding a divorce, Angle orchestrated a huge swerve and utilized his wife's interference to help him defeat Joe at Hard Justice. Angle walked out of that match with all the gold, but it was tarnished because of Angle's willingness to use cheap chicanery over his legitimate wrestling ability.

Still, we're somewhat willing to overlook even that transgression. After all, no less a grappling great than Ric Flair had a penchant for using mind games as a way to gain an advantage over an opponent. What we're less willing to overlook is Angle's case of diarrhea of the mouth.

In a recent interview with Live Audio Wrestling, Angle took a cheap shot at Smackdown World champion Batista, saying "The Animal" was simply "horrible" and more of a jacked-up bodybuilder than a true pro wrestler. It's one thing to talk trash about an opponent. At least that sort of trash talk can build to an eventual match and create fan interest. What Angle did was throw stones from afar. It came across as sour grapes from a man who previously held the title belt that currently rests around Batista's waist.

As the TNA World titleholder, Angle should be worried about more than another promotion's champion. The classy response—and the professional response—

to a question about Batista or any other WWE competitor would have been to politely say he was more concerned about the immediate threats to his title. Instead, Angle came across as catty, like a jilted lover saying his ex's current lover is too fat.

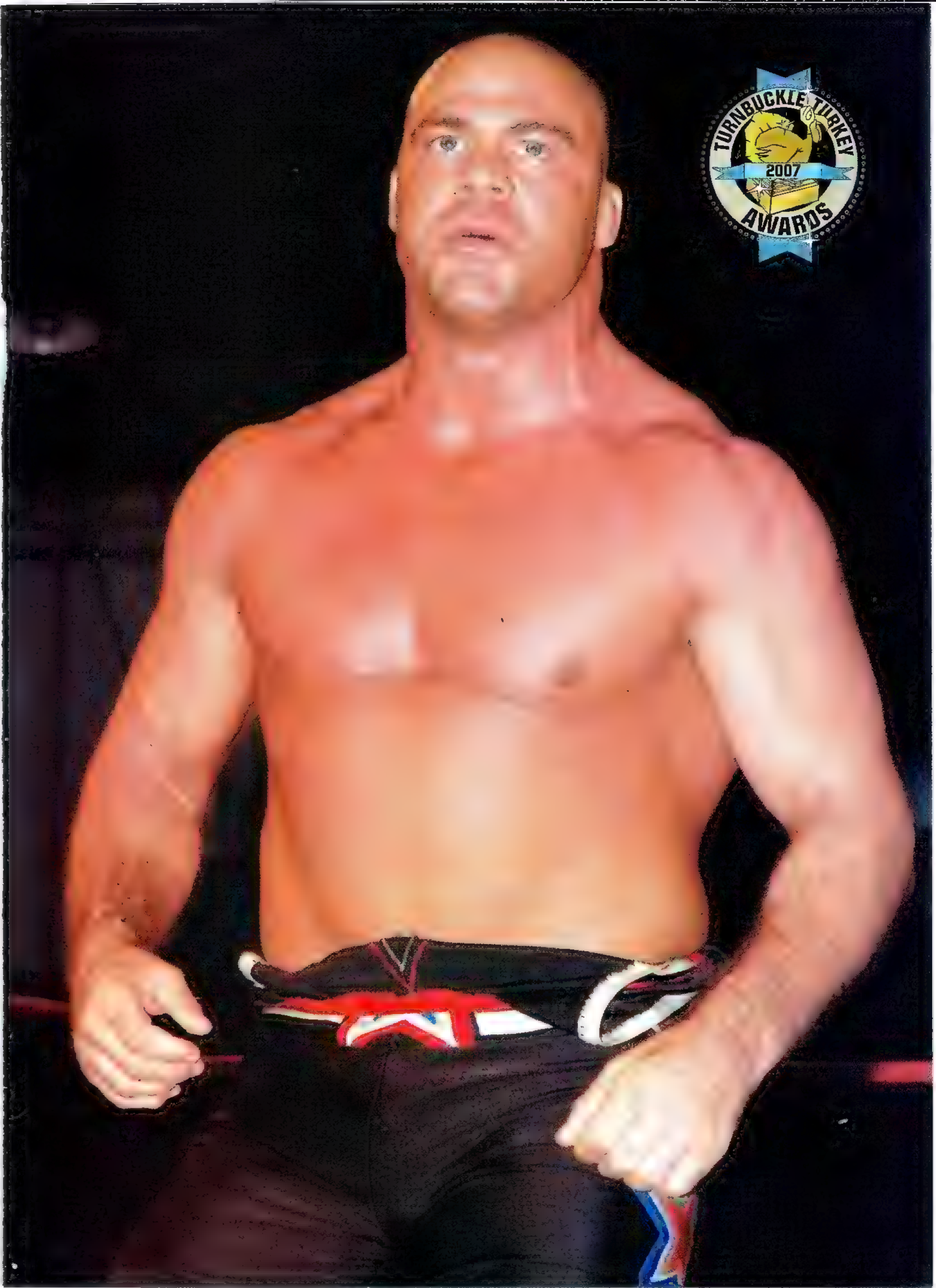
Then there is Angle's preoccupation with mixed martial arts. Every few months Angle claims he's planning on crossing over from pro wrestling to MMA. It hasn't happened yet, and if Angle's smart, it won't happen at all. Other than a fast payday, there's no upside in it. Remember how Daniel Puder humiliated Angle on Smackdown? What would happen to his marketability if he were soundly trounced by some unknown in his first MMA bout?

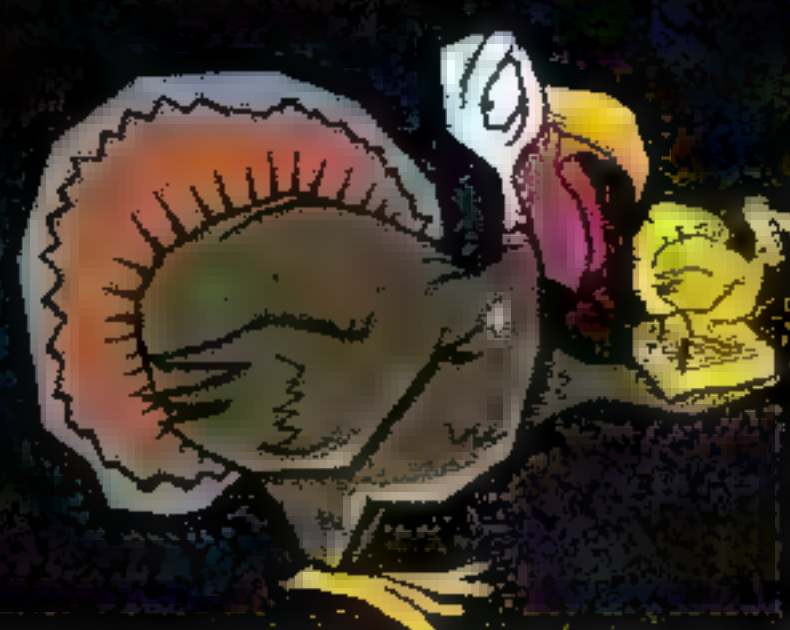
Finally, there is the incident in which he was arrested for driving under the influence on the very same week that *Impact* was set to expand to two hours on Spike TV. It was a shame that such a big week for TNA was spoiled by news that its champion and top star was busted for drunk driving.

Angle needs to remember where he is and what he is. He's not on Smackdown; he's in TNA. And he's the TNA World champion. It's about time for him to regain his focus and forget about MMA daydreams and bad-mouthing the competition. All in all, he just needs to get his act together.



Big mouth burning bridges





BRET

HART

For years, Bret Hart has exhibited one trait that has made him stand out in the world of wrestling: integrity.

As he painstakingly made clear in the documentary *Wrestling With Shadows*, Hart chose to leave the WWF for WCW only after doing some serious soul-searching and consulting with Vince McMahon before making his final decision. We all know how Vince screwed Hart a few months later at Survivor Series 1997 (hard to believe that happened 10 years ago this very month), and, ever since that time, Hart has said he would not work for McMahon ever again.

In 2005, Hart and McMahon finally made a tenuous peace as Bret collaborated with WWE on a DVD retrospective of his career and was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame. But it was clear that Hart agreed to those projects on his own terms. He even declined an invitation to appear at WrestleMania 21 the night after the Hall of Fame ceremony, maintaining that it would be hypocritical of him to receive a paycheck from McMahon. During that Hall of Fame ceremony, Hart reassured his fans that he had "moved on" from the wrestling phase of his career and embarked on a new array of projects.

Hart's message has always been clear. He still holds a grudge against McMahon for the infamous Survivor Series double-cross and steadfastly refuses to work any wrestling programs that could allow McMahon to exploit him for his own gain.

"The Hitman" has maintained these principles ever since he walked out of the WWF in 1997. But on June 11, 2007, Hart made a move that made us question just how committed he is to that moral high ground.

Hart was one of several past

and present superstars who aired their feelings on McMahon during "Mr. McMahon Appreciation Night" on Raw. Hart ripped on McMahon in a pre-taped promo, as did Bobby Heenan, Sgt. Slaughter, Dusty Rhodes, and several others.

However, Hart's promo left a bad taste in our mouth. Rather than offer the sort of passionate, soft-spoken assessment of McMahon that marked his lengthy comments at the Hall of Fame ceremony, Hart launched into an angry and passionate attack on "Mr. McMahon." In other words, Hart wasn't speaking from the heart. He was cutting a wrestling promo. He was essentially putting over the heel character Vince portrays.

In other words, Hart was appearing on WWE TV to advance a storyline. And that storyline turned out to be the apparent "death" of Mr. McMahon.

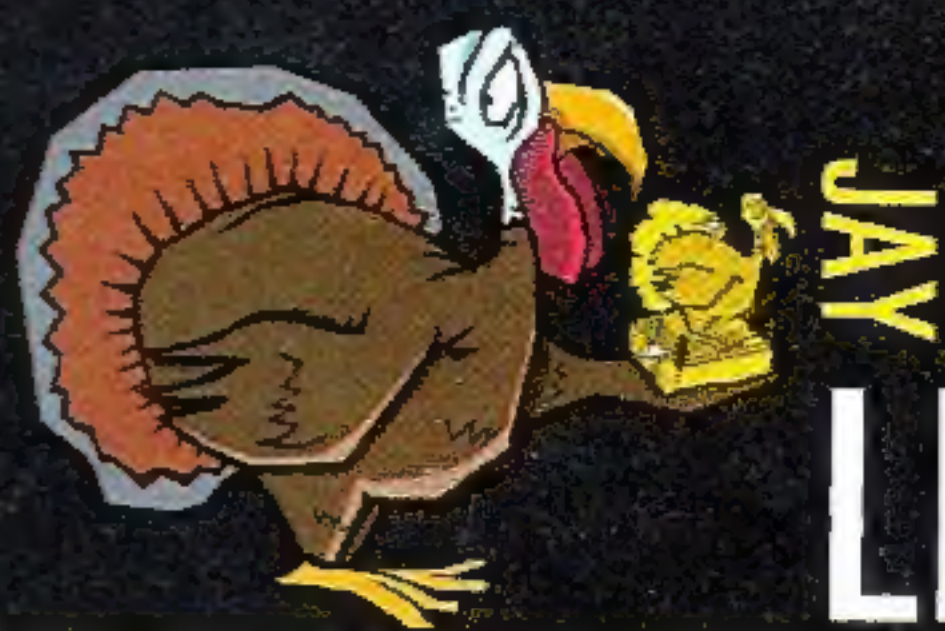
Admittedly, there's plenty of blame for that debacle to go around, but we were most disappointed in Hart for stooping to that level. Maybe Hart wasn't aware that the June 11 episode of Raw would end with McMahon's "demise," but his participation in a show built entirely around Vince's on-screen character seems disingenuous.

For a man who always claimed to be a real person in a world of cartoon characters, Bret willingly allowed himself to become yet another cartoon character for Mr. McMahon.



Sold his integrity to play WWE's game





LETHAL

There's nothing as unfunny as a comedian who runs his own joke into the ground.

We admit we laughed the first time we heard Jay Lethal do his spot-on Randy Savage impression. In a rarity for TNA, Lethal's sudden Savage fixation even made sense as Kevin Nash had been giving the youngster some "tips" on how to spice up his image and improve his marketability.

For a while, "Black Machismo" was pretty darn funny, especially the fact that he was announced as hailing from *Elizabeth*, New Jersey. Lethal had it all nailed: the voice, the mannerisms, the crazy eyes. But the joke went on ... and on ... and on. It's just not funny anymore. And, worse than that, we're starting to wonder if Lethal is ruining his career.

Lethal is a tremendously talented competitor in his own right. Remember, in one of his very first appearances in TNA, he very nearly defeated then-NWA champion Jeff Jarrett. Lethal has thrown it all away and allowed himself to become a walking punchline.

Lethal's shtick isn't doing any favors for TNA, either. The company has finally gotten the two-hour time slot it has coveted since it first signed with Spike TV. If that new elongated time slot has the desired effect and draws some new viewers who are willing to give the TNA brand a chance, what are those new viewers going to think when they tune in and see one of the company's featured stars (the X division champion as of this writing) impersonating a grappler whose best years took place almost 15 years ago? "Black Machismo" as a long-term character makes both Lethal and TNA look bush-league. It's like going to a new nightclub and finding a Soundgarden cover band on stage. Sure, Soundgarden was cool 15 years ago, but that act would be tired and played out today.

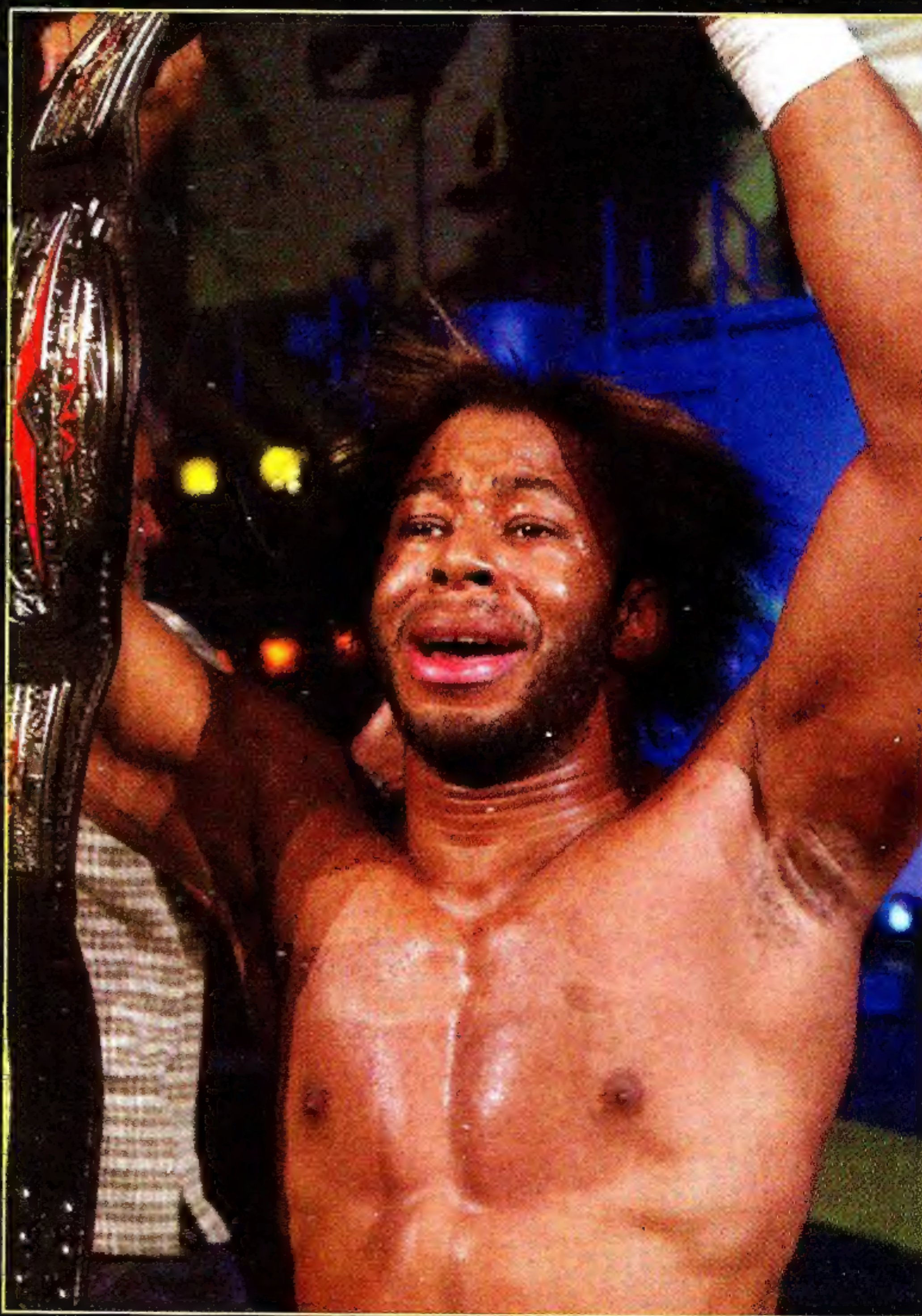
If Lethal's "Black Machismo" gimmick was designed for a big-money payoff match against the "Macho Man," then at

least we could see a direction for the character, culminating in what could be a career-making bout for Lethal. However, there doesn't appear to be any evidence that Savage is going to appear in TNA, and the chances of a Lethal-Savage bout are slim to none.

So why is Lethal still playing "Macho Man" dress-up? What's the point? It's no longer funny. It's overshadowing his own talent and ability. And the payoff match against Savage is never going to happen.

It's one thing when a young and inexperienced wrestler adopts a wacky persona as a method to attract attention while hiding his relative inexperience. But when that persona is simply a parody of a Hall of Fame competitor, all it does is make Lethal look like a hack. Lethal is doing himself no favors with the "Black Machismo" gimmick.

Lethal has become the Eugene of TNA—a talented competitor buried beneath a potentially career-ending gimmick ... and he has only himself to blame.



Lethal can excel by his own merits; he doesn't need Savage's





KEN

KENNEDY

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow us to introduce you to *Miiisssterrrr* Hypocrite ... Hypocrite.

We don't blame Ken Kennedy for having a very passionate response to the scrutiny WWE received in the weeks immediately following the deaths of Chris, Nancy, and Daniel Benoit. After all, everyone connected to the sport was reeling from that shocking news, and everyone had some sort of reaction to the onslaught of sensational media coverage.

But Kennedy posted a scathing attack on the media, personal attacks on Marc Mero and The Ultimate Warrior (both of whom had appeared as wrestling insiders on several TV news programs), and a strong defense of the WWE Wellness Policy.

"It's ridiculous, insane, and it really makes me sick that these so-called reporters like Bill O'Reilly, Nancy Grace, and Geraldo Rivera call upon these silly bastards who are bitter and frustrated that their careers have ended to represent the WWE, which, of course, makes all of us look like a bunch of babbling idiots who are all addicted to steroids, drugs, alcohol, etc.," Kennedy wrote. "Things are much different than they were five or 10 or 20 years ago!"

Kennedy went on to say that drug use is not tolerated in today's WWE locker room, and lambasted the late Johnny Grunge for "living outside of his means" and leaving his wife with debt and medical bills because he had no health insurance. He then said that wrestlers are like any other American citizens in that they have freedom of choice. Wrestlers who use steroids and illegal drugs are making poor choices, and those poor choices are not tolerated in the WWE locker room, Kennedy said.

"I have the right to choose whether or not I want to break the

law and use drugs," Kennedy said from atop his soapbox. "I have the right to choose between eating healthy food and exercising regularly and eating fast food three times a day, not going to the gym, and becoming obese like a good majority of the citizens in this country. When will individuals be held accountable for their own actions?"

The answer to that rhetorical question turned out to be about 30 days. That's roughly how much time elapsed between the time Kennedy posted his holier-than-thou web rant and when WWE suspended him for violating the aforementioned Wellness Policy. Apparently things aren't as different today as Kennedy made them out to be, and apparently Kennedy is just as guilty of making foolish decisions as wrestlers like "Superstar" Billy Graham, another person Kennedy beat up on in his rant.

We admire Kennedy for wanting to stand up for WWE and the wrestling industry as a whole, but writing a 1,110-word essay on how the industry has cleaned itself up and then getting in trouble yourself isn't the way to go about it. Mr. Kennedy is one turkey that wasn't organically grown.



Think before you speak

